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GOP readies its plan of attack

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With **Republican** voters in Iowa set to finally begin picking a nominee to challenge President Obama, **GOP** officials in Washington are quietly and methodically finishing what operatives are calling "the book" - 500 pages of Obama quotes and video links that will form the backbone of the party's attack strategy against the president leading up to Election Day 2012.

The document, portions of which were reviewed by The Washington Post, lays out how **GOP** officials plan to use Obama's words and voice as they build an argument for his defeat: that he made specific promises and entered office with lofty expectations and has failed to deliver on both.

Republican officials say they will leverage the party's newly catalogued video library containing every publicly available utterance from Obama since his 2008 campaign. Television and Internet ads will juxtapose specific Obama promises of job gains, homeowner assistance, help for people in poverty, lower health insurance premiums and stricter White House ethics standards against government data and news clippings that paint a different reality.

The decision by **GOP** officials to finalize a strategy at this stage underscores the view, in both parties, that the general-election campaign has begun - even if an official **Republican** nominee has not been selected.

The new **GOP** playbook is designed to take one of Obama's great assets - the power of his oratory - and turn it into a liability. It details hundreds of potential targets, partially a result of a president who **Republican** strategists say is unusually prone to making detailed promises.

A 2009 Obama statement that his stimulus bill would lift 2 million Americans out of poverty, for example, is paired against census data showing that more than 6 million Americans have fallen into poverty since he took office. A pledge that an administration housing plan would "help between 7 and 9 million families re-structure or refinance their mortgages" is paired against news reports showing the government spent far less than promised and aided fewer than 2 million.

And his 2008 Democratic nomination acceptance speech vow that a green jobs initiative would create 5 million jobs is matched up against news reports from this year depicting lackluster results and headlines about Solyndra, the failed maker of solar panels that received hundreds of millions in federal loan guarantees.

One Obama quote will be featured prominently: In 2009 he said on NBC's "Today" show that if he could not fix the economy in three years, "then there's going to be a one-term proposition."

"That's a clip the American people will hear and see over and over and over again throughout the next year," said **Republican** National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus. "The nice thing about Barack Obama is that he's given us plenty of material. The one thing he loves to do is give speeches."

A similar in-his-own-words strategy has already been adopted by Obama's campaign and the Democratic National Committee designed to portray **GOP** front-runner Mitt Romney as a flip-flopper.

A "Mitt vs. Mitt" online video, showing Romney expressing opposing views on various issues over time, gained considerable attention and prompted a new round of questions from primary rivals and journalists about whether Romney can be trusted.

With a campaign war chest expected to total at least \$750 million, the Obama campaign and the DNC are likely to continue hammering Romney's shifting stances on hot-button issues to portray him as lacking a moral core.

At the same time, Obama's team is compiling data to defend his record, such as a Congressional Budget Office report showing that the stimulus raised employment by millions of jobs and testimony from economists that the legislation helped end the Great Recession. Democratic strategists say voters are more apt to see Romney as untrustworthy than to question the president's leadership.

"Four years ago on Iowa caucus night, the president promised to make health care affordable and accessible for all Americans, put a middle-class tax cut in the pockets of working Americans, start to free us from our dependence on foreign oil and end the war in Iraq - promises that have been fulfilled," said Obama spokesman Ben LaBolt. "Compare that to a candidate like Mitt Romney, who has been on both sides of every key issue and will say anything to try to hide that he was a corporate buyout specialist who bankrupted companies and fired workers and a governor with the third-worst job-creation record in the country."

GOP officials are set to roll out new attacks in the coming days, starting Tuesday on caucus day in Iowa with a new video showing clips from Obama's victory speech there four years ago. The RNC will buy TV ad time in select battleground-state markets within weeks.

Once a nominee is established, the strategy book will then serve as a turnkey battle plan as the campaign and RNC staff begin close coordination.

A Romney win should make for an easy transition, as the book's primary author, Joe Pounder, a 28-year-old specialist in the political dark arts and the RNC's research director, is a former Romney campaign aide. And Romney appears to already have adopted the same approach - often quoting Obama directly and even visiting venues where Obama spoke as a candidate or as president.

Last summer, Romney spoke at a now-shuttered Allentown, Pa., metal works factory that Obama had hailed a year earlier before it closed as a symbol of his economic success. The event was accompanied by a video, called "Obama Isn't Working," depicting images of the visit coupled with a year-after picture of the abandoned factory floor.

Last week, Romney spoke in Davenport, Iowa, down the street from the spot where Obama gave one of his last pre-caucus campaign speeches four years earlier.

"He closed with these words: 'This is our moment. This is our time,' " Romney said. "Well, Mr. President, you have now had your moment. We have seen the results. . . . You have failed to deliver on the promises you made here in Davenport."

Several **Republican** strategists said that striking the right tone in attacking Obama will be tricky, because many Americans, even if they disapprove of his job performance, still see the country's first black president as a historic and admirable figure. Polls show that most people like him personally - making them more likely to discount traditional attack ads.

Still, party officials believe that many independent voters - more than eight in 10 of whom think the country is on the wrong track, according to a November Washington Post-ABC News poll - are ready to accept the premise that Obama didn't work out. Officials said they settled on the plan to use the president's own words after examining private and public polls showing that the approach resonated with swing voters nationally and in key battlegrounds.

"Because the president remains personally well liked, [the **GOP** strategy] is a good way to not have to swim against that tide," said Ed Gillespie, a former RNC chairman who is in regular contact with senior party officials. "It's his own words."

Similar conclusions emerged from months of focus groups and polling conducted by American Crossroads, the pro-**GOP** group that along with its affiliate, Crossroads GPS, expects to have raised \$240 million during

the 2011-12 cycle. A recent ad by the group featured a mom lying awake at night recalling that she backed Obama because he "spoke so beautifully" and promised recovery but now worrying that his policies were costly and ineffective.

"We don't bang voters upside the head with an anti-Obama message, but we appeal to their sensibility that maybe they supported him in the past, and we make it okay for them to not support him now," said Jonathan Collegio, a Crossroads spokesman.

The RNC's Obama book reflects a number of technology developments since the last campaign, such as video archives that are searchable by keyword. It has been collected in part by a team of staff members and interns who spend each day in a windowless room on the RNC's ground floor, staring at a dozen flat-screen TVs and monitoring the Web.

In the past, **opposition research** books took the form of three-ring binders. Many of those binders, dating to the 1976 race against President Jimmy Carter and spanning to the admittedly thin 2008 text on Obama, now sit on a bookshelf in the office of Pounder, the RNC research chief writing the 2012 book. This time, the document will exist only online, complete with links to videos, government reports, transcripts and other background material.

The new book contains more than a dozen chapters, including a 73-page section titled "The Obama Economy," and has separate chapters logging local-level campaign promises delivered during stops in places such as Cleveland, Denver and Scranton, Pa.

When Obama heads out on the campaign trail, officials will use the newly compiled quotes and data to put in place a full-scale mobilization, including videos, op-eds in local papers, calls with local media outlets and appearances by local **GOP** supporters, all designed to highlight the president's past statements in each locale, said Sean Spicer, the RNC's spokesman. Promises relating to the Hispanic community will be fed to Hispanic bloggers and media.

"He made so many promises in so many places," Spicer said. "The goal is whenever he does an interview in Scranton, Columbus, Ames, Cleveland or wherever, that every local reporter, blogger and concerned citizen says, 'Hey, we're armed here with information about the last time you were here, and we want you to answer to yourself.' "

The strategy can be seen in several Internet ads produced by the party in recent weeks.

A video titled "Failed Promises: Scranton" was released in November to coincide with an Obama visit to the northeastern Pennsylvania city. It shows Obama speaking about jobs and the economy, his face depicted through shattered windows of an abandoned factory as job-loss stats flash across the screen.

Another RNC ad, "It's Been Three Years," shows Obama as a candidate saying the "real question" is whether Americans would be better off in four years. Then it shows a clip from an October ABC interview when he tells George Stephanopoulos that "I don't think they're better off than they were four years ago."

The spot ends with Obama the 2008 candidate drawing roaring applause when he proclaims: "This country can't take four more years of the same failed policies. It's time to try something new."

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Polling analyst Scott Clement contributed to this report.