

# The New York Times

October 1, 2010

## In California Bid, Whitman Spends Record but Struggles

By **ADAM NAGOURNEY**

LOS ANGELES — [Meg Whitman](#), the Republican candidate for governor in California, passed a milestone the other day, investing \$119 million of her own money into her campaign, breaking a record held by Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) of New York.

But Ms. Whitman is the latest wealthy Californian to learn that it may take more than money to win an election here, particularly for a first-time candidate confronting a vast and convoluted electoral landscape. With a month to go until Election Day, Ms. Whitman is struggling against a Democrat, Jerry Brown, who, after spending most of his career in public office, had been seen by Republicans as the best opponent Ms. Whitman could have asked for, given voters' frustration with the state's dysfunctional government.

Ms. Whitman's most recent problem emerged as she sought to explain this week how she had employed for nine years a Mexican housekeeper who was an illegal immigrant. Ms. Whitman has been an advocate of penalties against employers who hire illegal immigrants. But she said she had not known of the housekeeper's illegal status until the woman informed her last year, and she sought to provide documentation to back up that claim.

The episode has proved a distracting embarrassment that has raised questions about Ms. Whitman's credibility and has threatened to derail a key element of any strategy to win election in a largely Democratic state: appealing to Latino voters. As she has sought to explain what happened, Ms. Whitman said she had fired the housekeeper on the spot, even as she described the maid as a close part of her family, and seemed undisturbed by the idea that her onetime friend and employee might be deported.

Martin Maldonado, 51, a naturalized American citizen from Mexico, said of the revelations, "I think she did know — how could you not know the legal status of someone working in your house for nine years?" Mr. Maldonado said he had voted for Gov. [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#), a Republican, but this time was considering voting for Mr. Brown.

Victoria Kostman, 61, a Mexican-American who said she had been leaning toward voting for Mr. Brown before this, also said she did not believe Ms. Whitman and was angered by the way she had treated the employee. "You say she's family, then treat her like family," Ms. Kostman said. "We help family, not throw them out on the street."

All of this is likely to be a key topic of discussion when Ms. Whitman and Mr. Brown appear on Saturday at a Spanish-language debate hosted by Univision in Fresno.

As it is, many Republicans have been frustrated by the extent to which Ms. Whitman's campaign seems stuck in place, even after she has spent a total of \$145 million, compared with \$4 million by Mr. Brown (though he has been helped by nearly \$13 million in ads placed by independent committees, mostly unions, according to a study by the California Fair Political Practices Commission).

A series of polls show Ms. Whitman effectively tied with Mr. Brown, despite the fact that Mr. Brown has, at least until recently, run a low-energy campaign.

The electoral environment would seem ideally made for a business leader — she was once the chief executive of eBay — coming in with a pledge to purge the system of career politicians. On Friday night, after months of struggling, legislative leaders and Mr. Schwarzenegger reached an agreement on a state budget, those legislators said, according to Bloomberg News. The state had been without a budget for 93 days, a record, and the next governor is going to inherit a government staggered by years of budget cuts, layoffs and political gridlock.

Mike Murphy, who is Ms. Whitman's chief political strategist, said he thought the dispute over the housekeeper would be forgotten within days. "This is a flap," he said. "Which means there will be reporters howling around for a few days. My guess is by the beginning of the week, the focus of the campaign will be back to jobs, schools and Jerry Brown's record."

Mr. Murphy argued that Ms. Whitman was doing quite well, considering the advantage Democrats had in the state. "It's a highly competitive state," he said, "and we are Republicans, so the idea that she'd be 10 points ahead is this fantasy in Sacramento."

But analysts suggested that was precisely Ms. Whitman's problem here: In order to win in California, even when the climate is tough for Democrats, Ms. Whitman has to be an exceptional candidate and run an exceptional campaign. So far, they said, she has failed to do that. "It's a Democratic state," said Allan Hoffenblum, a Republican analyst here. "For a Republican to win, you have to have a superior campaign and a superior candidate. And she has not quite done that."

Ms. Whitman has spent much of the campaign explaining why she had rarely voted before entering politics. Her record at eBay, including layoffs under her watch, has been the subject of scrutiny. And she has been assailed by independent fact-checkers for running what were described as misleading or false advertisements attacking Mr. Brown by portraying him as a big spender when he served as governor of California in the 1970s.

At the very moment that Ms. Whitman was challenged about her account of what happened with her housekeeper, Mr. Brown's campaign was running a campaign that portrayed her as Pinocchio, part of a strategy to raise questions about her credibility and character, said [Joe Trippi](#), Mr. Brown's senior adviser.

"It's not like she hasn't used up every negative argument she has," Mr. Trippi said. "Because she has. I don't think she can pull anything out of that bag of tricks that she hasn't pulled out."

A Brown ad released on Friday attacked Ms. Whitman's record as head of eBay, ending with an announcer saying: "We're choosing a governor. Shouldn't character matter?"

The dispute over the maid is potentially problematic because, until now, Ms. Whitman had shown signs of making inroads among Latino voters. After assuming a relatively tough line on illegal [immigration](#) in the primary — though explicitly avoiding the tough anti-illegal immigrant law passed in Arizona — she moved, the moment the general election began, to appeal to Latino voters with an extensive and expensive Spanish-language campaign that extended from television airwaves to bus stops to billboards that read, "Más Trabajos," or more jobs.

A poll by The Los Angeles Times and the [University of Southern California](#) last week found that Ms. Whitman was drawing 31 percent of the Hispanic vote. By contrast, 19 percent of Latinos said they would vote for [Carly Fiorina](#), a Republican candidate for the Senate, who has taken a much harder line on immigration. The poll was taken before the housekeeper revelations, and Ms. Whitman probably needs to win closer to 35 percent of the Latino vote in order to win, Mr. Hoffenblum said.

Said Mark DiCamillo, the director of the California Field Poll: "For a candidate that is both trying to maintain her base Republican conservative vote and reach out to constituencies she would need support from as a Republican running in a Democratic state — Latinos and independents — this is not a good issue."

*Jesse McKinley contributed reporting from San Francisco, and Ana Facio Contreras from Los Angeles.*