Republicans ignoring signs of some economic gains

BY TOM RAUM
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WASHINGTON — You wouldn't know it from listening to the Republican National Convention, but the nation's economic picture seems to be slowly getting a little brighter.

Not a lot, and not very fast. Yet there are some glimmers.

But a steady drumbeat of gloom and doom is predictably being sounded at the GOP gathering in Tampa, Fla. — even by Republican governors who are quick to tout economic improvements in their own states.

Nationally, the recent gains are modest and won't do much to push the unemployment rate down much below its present 8.3 percent level before the Nov. 6 presidential election.

But economists cite some encouraging new data:

• The government reported Thursday that Americans spent at the fastest pace in five months in July, and personal income rose as well.

• Home prices rose in the first half of 2012 for the first time in nearly two years. Sales of both new and previously occupied homes also are up.

• Employers added 163,000 jobs in July, the most since February.

• U.S. exports, retail spending and factory production are all up.

Yet phrases such as "catastrophic debt," "stifling the American dream," "the tide of decline" and "an all-out assault on free enterprise" fill the air in the convention arena.

The rhetoric fits the GOP strategy of portraying President Barack Obama as out of touch and pursuing policies that have made the economy worse, not better, while Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney is presented as the one with the business experience and savvy to turn things around.