Decision 2012

Romney's Focus On Obama Brings New Challenges

BY STEVE PEOPLES AND KASIE HUNT **Associated Press**

GREEN BAY, Wis. — As Mitt Romney looked for a sweep in Tuesday's three Republican primaries to tighten his grip on the party's nomination, President Barack Obama criticized the GOP front-runner by name in a campaign ad for the first time, signaling that he too thinks the nomination race is all but over.

Regardless of the outcome in Wisconsin, Maryland and Washington, D.C., Romney was rapidly shifting toward the general election — and the challenges of Obama's better-financed and better-organized opposition.

The president flexed that campaign muscle Monday, suggesting that he's ready for Romney even if the former Massachusetts governor isn't quite ready for him. Obama released a television ad set to run in six swing states accusing Romney of standing with "Big Oil." The ad came hours after the release of a similar campaign from an Obama ally.

Romney has been ignoring his Republican rivals for several days and taking it to the Democratic president, whom he accused Monday of "crushing dreams" with a "gov-

"He takes his political inspiration from the capitals of Europe," Romney told supporters in Green Bay, Wis., one day before the latest primaries in the GOP fight. "His version of a perfect world is a bigspending big government."



can primary, already 3 months old, has complicated his ability to re-focus his broader organization and resources toward Obama. Aides concede that staff building and fundraising for the fall match-up are lagging.

Romney's recent string of high-dollar California fundraisers was limited to raising money only for the Republican primary contests. Aides are only beginning to take steps to raise cash to use against Obama, who has been aggressively fundraising and distributed staff on the ground in almost every state in the nation.

The delay has given Obama a massive head start. The disparity is staggering.

At the end of February, Obama reported \$84.7 million in his campaign account compared to Romney's \$7.3 million. Obama has more than 530 paid staff compared to roughly 100 for Romney.

A fading Rick Santorum, also campaigning in Wisconsin on Monday, said that Romney has essentially bought his success by outspending the competition.

Romney and his allies have spent a combined \$53 million on television advertising so far this election cycle compared to just \$27 million from his three Republican competitors combined, according to data compiled by the media tracking firm SMG Delta.

Santorum's team, having narrowly lost a string of high-profile contests, spent just \$9 million.

"With almost unlimited resources, Gov. Romney has not proven to be very effective," Santorum said Monday as he predicted a possible upset in Wisconsin. "The only way he's been successful in winning the primaries is by just bludgeoning his opponents by an overwhelming money advantage — something he's not going to have in the general election.'

In the primary race, Romney has a huge advantage in delegates. On Monday, The Associated Press count had Romney with exactly half the delegates needed to win the nomination, 572, and twice as many delegates as Santorum.

For the fall campaign, Romney's presidential hopes may rest, at least in part, upon the ability of the Republican National Committee to give him a running start. The RNC, beset by problems of its own in recent years, says it's ready to meet the challenge. Yet party officials acknowledge limitations. General election fundraising in particular has suffered without a nominee.

The RNC last week announced it had filled a "presidential trust" with \$21 million to spend in coordination with the nominee. But there is no limit on what the committee can raise and spend on its own to support the party's presidential contender.

"There are donors that are sitting on the sidelines right now," said RNC political director Rick Wiley.

Romney's campaign has also been anxious to be able to raise money for the party itself when it holds finance events — donors can cut checks of up to \$30,800 to the party committee. But without the nomination, they haven't been able to ask for that money

The complications extend beyond fundraising.

Wiley said the committee's nationwide network of "victory centers" might not be fully operational until August unless a nomi-

"I think you will see as soon as you get a nominee, an accelerated ramp-up of staff," Wiley said. "Right now everyone's out the door by August, but I can see a scenario where everyone was out the door by June or July if we had a nominee in the next 30 days

or so." Late last month, the RNC opened general election offices in North Carolina and Virginia and in Florida, a critical swing state where the committee now has 10 offices, according to Wiley. And this week offices are set to open in Nevada, Colorado, New Mex-

ico and Michigan. Romney's campaign, which would assume control of the offices should he claim the nomination, has been slow to implement a plan to reach Hispanic voters, outside of a handful of states, such as Florida. The RNC separately is instituting Hispanic state directors this week in Florida, North Carolina, Virginia, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada.

While the RNC cannot pick sides before a nominee emerges, Romney's campaign has benefited from a network of informal alliances. Many members of Romney's senior staff have either worked for, or closely with, the RNC for years.

President Is Confident Health Care Law Will Be Upheld

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama says he remains confident that the health care law approved during his administration will be upheld by the U.S. Supreme

Obama says: "It's constitutional."

Obama says the health care law was passed by a democratically elected Congress and that he doesn't think "unelected" members of the Supreme Court should overturn the legislation.

He says the law touches upon economic, legal and human concerns, and he hopes "that's not forgotten in the political debate.'

Last week, the health care law faced skepticism from conservative justices during three days of oral arguments, raising questions over whether the president's signature accomplishment will remain intact.

Midwest

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The March inventory index increased to 58.9 from February's 54.2. Goss said that suggests businesses are expecting to expand production in the next few months.

The export index grew to 56.4 in March from February's 55.3, and the import index increased to 57.4 in March from 56.6 in Febru-

The other components of the March index were:

New orders at 60.8, up from 58.4 in February.

– Production or sales at 60.4, down from 60.9.

– And deliveries at 54.5 in March, down from February's 56.4.

ASKA: CREIGHTON, O'NEILL

TYLER

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Becker

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3. What is the biggest issue you see facing the Yankton cnool District and Wny?

Education advancement, trust

4. If elected to the board, do you see a need to repair the apparent disconnect between the direction of the district and a majority of voters in the community? If so, do you have ideas to address this?

Yes, we need to work together understanding the fiscal limitations while keeping the children's education in the forefront.

5. Why should you be elected to the board rather than your competitors? What do you offer that they do not? I have no self-interest, job or fi-

nancial ties that would keep me from voting for the best use of our tax dollars in the children's interest for a sustainable educa-

6. Final thoughts?

I plan to listen for and research all options in providing sensible solutions to the fiscal challenges facing the school during this difficult time.



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