

Romney wins Florida Republican primary

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1 February 2012

Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney won the Florida Republican presidential primary Tuesday, defeating his closest rival, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, by 47 percent to 32 percent. Former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum received 13 percent while Texas Congressman Ron Paul trailed with 7 percent.

Voter turnout in the state was likely to fall below the predicted level of two million. With 96 percent of the precincts reporting, just over 1.6 million votes had been counted, suggesting the final total would be around 1.7 million. That would be a drop of about 15 percent from the approximately two million who voted in 2008, when Romney lost the state to the eventual Republican nominee, John McCain.

In Florida's most populous county, Miami-Dade, barely 125,000 voted in the primary, compared to 360,000 who voted for McCain in the 2008 presidential election. Vote totals were down in every county compared to the 2008 primary, despite a rise in population since then.

Indications are that the campaign waged by the two leading contenders, Romney and Gingrich—consisting of negative television commercials, personal vituperation, and ever more reactionary policy proposals—alienated the public and produced a drop-off in the vote.

As result of his plurality victory, Romney wins all 50 delegates at stake. Florida is the biggest state to hold a primary or caucus so far, and the first to award delegates on a winner-take-all basis, although the number awarded was cut in half because Florida violated Republican Party rules by moving up the date of the primary.

While Romney is now considered the frontrunner, as a result of the first four contests he has obtained only one-tenth of the 1,144 delegates required to win the nomination. February features only three contests that

actually award delegates—the Nevada caucuses on Saturday and primaries in Arizona and Michigan on February 28.

Even the so-called Super Tuesday contests in seven states on March 6 may not settle the outcome. Because the Republican Party changed its rules after the 2008 campaign, eliminating winner-take-all provisions in many states, the struggle for the nomination could continue, with delegates divided among three or four candidates and no one emerging with a majority for some months.

As befits a process that is completely manipulated by wealthy interests and the corporate-controlled media, the duration of the campaign for the Republican presidential nomination may well be determined by a single billionaire, Las Vegas casino mogul Sheldon Adelson, who bankrolled Gingrich's comeback from also-ran in Iowa and New Hampshire to victory in South Carolina January 21.

Gingrich told Bloomberg News on the weekend that his campaign was down to its last \$600,000, a trivial sum by the standards of American capitalist politics, and less than the Romney campaign has been spending each day on television advertising. Without a new cash infusion from Adelson—the billionaire gave \$5 million for the South Carolina primary and his wife gave another \$5 million for Florida—Gingrich could be forced to put his campaign in mothballs.

The vote tallies Tuesday corresponded more or less to the amount of money available to each of the four candidates. Romney overwhelmed his opponents with more than \$15 million in television advertising, nearly all of it mudslinging commercials aimed at Gingrich. With a long congressional career and a lucrative post-congressional stint as an influence peddler, the former speaker was highly vulnerable to such tactics.

By one calculation, made by the Wesleyan Media Project based on data collected by Kantar

Media/CMAG, for the period January 1-January 25, the Romney campaign and its supporting super PACs had purchased 12,768 ad spots in media outlets in Florida markets, compared to only 210 ad spots for Gingrich and none for Santorum and Paul.

During the final six days of the campaign, Gingrich and his supporting super PAC, funded by Adelson, spent more than \$3 million on television advertising in Florida. This sum was dwarfed, however, by the continuing flood of advertising for Romney and against Gingrich.

Super PACs were made legal by the Supreme Court's January 2010 decision in the *Citizens United* case, which held that corporations possessed the same free speech rights under the First Amendment as human beings, and that longstanding federal bans on direct corporate spending to influence elections were unconstitutional. This reactionary ruling has cemented the grip which business interests and billionaires exercise over the US electoral process and both of the officially recognized capitalist parties.

The final days of the campaign saw an increasingly frantic effort by the Gingrich campaign to counter the tidal wave of negative advertising—focusing exclusively on Gingrich's character and role as a Washington lobbyist—by making more and more extreme appeals to ultra-right sentiments.

At one rally, Gingrich called Romney, a multimillionaire and Mormon bishop, “somebody who is a pro-abortion, pro-gun-control, pro-tax-increase liberal.” In a particularly vicious appeal to Christian fundamentalist backwardness, he told a forum in Winter Park that stem-cell research involved “the use of science to justify desensitizing the society to killing babies.” He said he would ban all such research and would favor a federal investigation into the management of fertility clinics, aimed at witch-hunting doctors who discard excess embryos not used for *in vitro* fertilization.

Gingrich repeatedly denounced Obama, who has presided over an administration that is, if anything, more right-wing than that of George W. Bush, as a “European socialist.” Several Gingrich campaign rallies featured raucous interruptions from supporters among the “birthers,” the faction of the ultra-right which claims that Obama was born in Kenya and is therefore not constitutionally eligible to be president.

Gingrich also made open appeals to religious prejudice against the Mormon Romney, accusing him of discriminating against Catholics and Jews during his four years as governor of Massachusetts.

While his campaign is financed by a Jewish billionaire, and Gingrich has presented himself as the arch-advocate of the state of Israel, he has combined this with tacit appeals to anti-Semitism. Gingrich not only reiterated his attacks on Obama's alleged ties to 1960s community organizer Saul Alinsky, but linked Romney repeatedly to liberal billionaire George Soros (a Hungarian Jew who survived the Holocaust) and to Goldman Sachs, the investment bank that manages Romney's personal fortune in a blind trust.

On economic policy, Romney, Gingrich and Santorum all campaigned in favor of further tax cuts for the wealthy. Romney proposed cuts of \$180 billion a year, or \$1.8 trillion over 10 years, through reducing the top rates for high-income individuals like himself.

Gingrich went much further, calling for abolishing all taxes on capital gains and cutting the corporate tax rate to 12.5 percent, for a total cost of \$850 billion in the first year. Santorum went even further, with a different set of tax handouts to the wealthy totaling \$900 billion.



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