Romney wins Nevada Republican caucuses on low turnout

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Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney won the Nevada Republican caucuses February 4 with 48 percent of the vote, compared to 23 percent for former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and 19 percent for Texas Congressman Ron Paul. Former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum trailed with only 7 percent.

Voter turnout was well below the 44,000 who participated in 2008, suggesting that none of the Republican candidates has been able to arouse much popular enthusiasm. As the Associated Press reported: "In the months and weeks leading up to the caucuses, party officials frequently readjusted expectations, initially projecting 100,000 voters would show up, then 70,000, then 60,000, then 55,000 before some predicted late Friday that turnout would not exceed the 2008 results."

Despite press coverage describing Romney's victory as "sweeping" and "impressive," his total vote with 82 percent of precincts counted was only 13,442, well below the 22,000 votes he won in 2008 when he carried Nevada but lost the Republican nomination contest to John McCain.

Romney is also favored in the contests next Tuesday, caucuses in Minnesota and Colorado and a non-binding primary vote in Missouri, as well as in the last two contests of the month, the primaries February 28 in Michigan and Arizona.

With 82 percent of precincts counted, Gingrich received only 6,083 votes and Paul received 5,239 votes, but their campaigns nonetheless continue to receive endless attention from the media. By comparison, independent candidate Ralph Nader won 6,150 votes in the state in the 2008 general election, in which Obama defeated McCain in Nevada by 533,000 to 412,000.

There is widespread disillusionment with Obama's policies among working people in Nevada since the administration has refused to take any serious action either to create jobs or alleviate the plight of homeowners who are "under water" on their mortgages. Since the last presidential election Nevada has become the state most blighted by the US economic crisis.

According to one report, a staggering 200,000 homes in the Las Vegas metropolitan area face foreclosure. But as the *Los Angeles Times* noted, "Although Nevada has the nation's highest unemployment rate, 12.6 percent, and leads the country in foreclosures, the candidates never discussed the housing collapse in any detail."

Romney had reason not to discuss the issue, since he was widely reported last year to have declared, during a visit to Las Vegas, that the only solution to the housing crisis was to allow the market to "hit bottom."

The most revealing episode in the four days between the January 31 Florida primary and the Nevada caucuses was Romney's interview February 1 on CNN, when he made the instantly notorious comment that he was "not concerned about the very poor." He also dismissed poverty as a serious issue, suggesting that only 4 to 5 percent of the population lives in poverty, although the actual figure is closer to 50 percent of the American people living in poverty or near poverty.

While Romney later claimed the remark was taken out of context, the context actually makes the statement even more ignorant and reactionary. "We have a safety net to help those that are very poor," he said. "My focus is on middle-income Americans… we have a very ample safety net, and we can talk about whether it needs to be strengthened or whether there are holes in it. But we have food stamps, we have Medicaid, we have housing vouchers, we have programs to help the

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poor."

In fact, the multimillionaire former CEO of a private equity firm has already proposed the abolition of Medicaid by transforming it into a block grant to the states and capping its growth at 1 to 2 percent a year, far below the rate of inflation in medical costs. His budget-cutting proposals would require devastating reductions in food stamps, housing vouchers and other safety net programs.

The reaction in the Republican Party and the right-wing media to Romney's dismissal of the poor was to criticize him from the right. The *Wall Street Journal* dismissed the significance of the remarks on poverty, but blasted Romney when he attempted to offset this comment by endorsing proposals to index the minimum wage to inflation, claiming, "Mr. Romney's response was more troubling than his earlier remarks. Few policies are as destructive as the minimum wage …"

Gingrich criticized Romney for making a supportive reference to the government safety net, declaring, "It isn't a safety net, it's a spider web," and reiterating the usual claim of the ultra-right that it is wrong to take any measures to alleviate the social misery created by capitalism in any way because this creates "dependency."

All of the presidential candidates of the big business parties—Obama as well as his four Republican opponents—support policies that force the working class to pay for the crisis of capitalism through major cuts or outright privatization of bedrock social programs like Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security.

Gingrich gave an unusual press conference after his defeat in the Nevada caucuses, denouncing suggestions that he might quit the campaign for the Republican presidential nomination and denouncing Romney for both his campaign tactics and his supposed political moderation.

He claimed he would continue his campaign to the Republican National Convention in Tampa, focusing especially on the ten states that hold primaries and caucuses on March 6, so-called Super Tuesday, as well as subsequent southern primaries in Alabama March 13 and Texas April 3. Gingrich claimed that he would be "very, very competitive in delegate count" by the time of the Texas primary.

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