

# The Salt Lake Tribune

## Forlorn dream: End for Romney's campaign began in Iowa

By Thomas Burr  
The Salt Lake Tribune

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WASHINGTON - The end started in Iowa.

Mitt Romney fielded a stellar team of staffers, threw up millions in television commercials and, above all, personified the look and charisma of a president. But as returns started flowing in, Romney wasn't winning.

Romney, who turned the scandal-tarred Olympics around, dismissed the Jan. 3 loss. It was a silver medal, not a defeat, he bellowed to a crowd of supporters.

The losses continued in New Hampshire, in South Carolina, in Florida, and beyond.

A few victories, especially one in his native Michigan, helped sustain his campaign. But rival John McCain was racking up delegates, and on Tuesday, as a bevy of states started tipping toward the Arizona senator, Romney put on a brave face and vowed to continue on anyway.

Thursday morning, he wised up.

"If this were only about me, I would go on," Romney, with puffy eyes, told a friendly crowd at the Conservative Political Action Committee conference in Washington. "But I entered this race because I love America, and because I love America, I feel I must now stand aside, for our party and for our country."

He added that a continued GOP battle would make it more likely that a Democrat would win in November. "And in this time of war, I simply cannot let my campaign be a part of aiding a surrender to terror.'

The move was an attempt to score political points with fellow Republicans, and a reminder to the party's powerbrokers that he plans to be back.

Supporters crowding the room - many holding foam mitts, red powersticks and Romney signs - weren't ready for the announcement and didn't want to accept defeat. Some booed when Romney said he was suspending his campaign. Others appeared close to tears after he left the stage.

Arkansas surprise: Many political

### Video of Romney's speech

See video of Mitt Romney's speech [here](#) .

observers saw Romney as the perfect

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candidate a year ago when he announced his bid for the presidency. He had the great resume - ran a successful venture-capital business, fixed the Olympics and served as Massachusetts governor - his appeal to the GOP right was spot on, and his hair, well, it was perfect.

But Romney also had hurdles. He's a Mormon, a religion a good section of voters are wary of. He had taken some liberal positions in previous races and switching to more conservative positions left him sporting a flip-flopper label.

And above all, Romney's campaign underestimated Mike Huckabee.

The former Arkansas governor and ordained Baptist minister picked up support in Iowa that Romney had sought: the evangelical voters who make up such a large portion of the electorate.

The folksy Huckabee swung into Iowa relatively unknown and left with the state's nod. In New Hampshire, Huckabee and Romney fought over the conservative vote, allowing McCain to take the Granite State with moderates and independents.

The trend continued, coming to a head on Super Tuesday as Huckabee swallowed up evangelical voters in Southern states, McCain grabbing Northern and Western states and Romney struggling to garner delegates.

Wednesday morning, after the Super Tuesday dust had settled over Romney's path to the White House, the candidate sat with advisers wondering whether it would be worth using the Conservative Political Action Committee conference as a big "wow moment," a platform to launch a campaign surge, or to be gracious in defeat and hope party bigwigs remember his sacrifice.

Political observers said Romney simply wasn't able to overcome several big challenges.

"Even the smartest businessman sometimes cannot complete the sale," says Kellyanne Conway, president of The Polling Company, which promotes conservative causes.

"Romney did most things right: smart strategists, an emphasis on early states, on-the-ground organization. Still, the inability to shore up rank-and-file conservatives and its leaders or at least allay their early concerns that he had changed his mind on a host of core issues, from marriage and life to immigration, left a permanent scar."

Among evangelical leaders, Romney's faith was "the elephant in the room," said Gregory Johnson, president of Standing Together, a Utah network of evangelical churches.

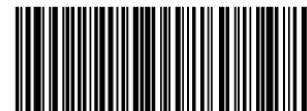
"There was enough ignorance, enough suspicion, enough secrecy about

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Mormonism for people to say, 'They're nice people, but . . .' And it's that 'but' that killed Romney," said Johnson.

A few turns in the race might have yielded a much different result. Had Romney won Iowa, he could have parlayed that into a win in New Hampshire. Had Huckabee not carried such a huge margin of the religious right, Romney could have taken the mantle of the conservative candidate. Had the top issue in the campaign been the economy versus the Iraq war, Romney could have touted his resume more.

"This race had so many moments where a little thing here or there could have changed everything," says Kirk Jowers, a Romney friend and supporter who runs the University of Utah Hinckley Institute of Politics. "There was a moment when Romney was seen as the presumptive nominee by many, was leading or within margin of error in many early states and seemed almost invincible."

But, he adds, "Huckabee's victory in Iowa opened the door for McCain's victory in New Hampshire and forever changed the trajectory in the race."

On to 2012: Romney had followed in his father's footsteps in running for the presidency, and in the end, withdrew months before the convention like George Romney as well. But Mitt Romney may have another

crack at the White House.

His move Thursday, clearing the path for McCain to nab the nomination, may have also cleared his own path to a possible vice presidential slot on the ticket or a cozy job in a potential McCain administration.

Or, if nothing else, now that Romney is more of a household name, he could return to the trail in 2012 or 2016 and try again.

Sen. Bob Bennett, a Utah Republican and close adviser to Romney, described the conversation Wednesday with strategists.

"Romney asked, 'If we do stay in, what'll it take?' " Bennett said.

"And they said, 'You will have to go into Virginia and Maryland and absolutely savage John McCain.' And he said he was not going to do that. He said, 'I can't do that.' "

More than \$35 million of his own fortune spent, Romney now is resigned to former-candidate status. But since he grabbed nearly 270 delegates, he also becomes a powerful force in what happens on the GOP side. He would have had more, of course, if things had turned out differently in Iowa.

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\* JESSICA RAVITZ contributed to this report.

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Experts say Romney's candidacy was undone by several things:

- \* Many voters never could accept his Mormon faith.
- \* Some saw his change of position on issues as flip-flops.
- \* Mike Huckabee was an effective rival for conservative votes.
- \* He failed to get an early victory to galvanize his campaign.

## Why suspend?

\* **When Mitt Romney dropped out** of the presidential race Thursday, he technically only suspended his campaign.

\* **That doesn't mean Romney is considering popping back** into the race. Candidates officially don't end their campaigns for a couple reasons: A suspended campaign can still raise money to pay off debts, keep all pledged delegates as negotiating power and allow a candidate to come back, say, if a scandal brings down the nominee.

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