Mitt Romney sweeps April 3rd primaries, is proclaimed the “presumptive nominee.” Picking up 86 of the 95 delegates available in Maryland, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia, Romney has largely secured himself the Republican nomination. Thus far he has taken 658 of the 1,144 delegates he needs, and is on track to win the others. With these victories coming on the heels of several endorsements, Romney’s momentum, money, and organization seems poised to deny Rick Santorum any further serious victories. The next – and possibly final – key race is Pennsylvania. Though Santorum still leads Romney by 41 percent to 35 percent in Santorum’s home state¹, the next three weeks of campaigning and advertisements could help Romney slip ahead.

Romney’s recent wins add to a growing sense of finality. This atmosphere has led to a growing number of Republican leaders finally starting to rally around the candidate. For many, however, their endorsements seem to be driven more by a sense of acquiescence than enthusiasm for their candidate. New York’s Governor Pataki said in his endorsement, “Well, I think it’s time for Republicans to rally around our nominee…We are still bogged down shooting at each other and the President is looking presidential.” He went on to say, “Mitt is not a perfect candidate. He has a number of problems.”²

Utah’s Senator Mike Lee echoed Pataki, saying “I think we would be well-advised as Republicans to start getting behind our eventual nominee.”³ The first President Bush added his voice this week. Said Senator Marco Rubio in an interview following his own endorsement, “There are a lot of other people out there that some of us wish had run for president — but they didn’t…I think Mitt Romney would be a fine president, and he’d be way better than the guy who’s there right now.”⁴ When asked if she was “happy” with Romney, former VP nominee and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin hesitated and replied that “anything but Obama” would be better for the country.⁵

Paul Ryan, whose budget Romney recently lauded, rewarded the candidate with another endorsement, though Romney may find the connection a hindrance in his campaign against Obama. “A budget which offers substantial tax benefits for very rich people and draconian cuts that affect the middle class gives Obama an opportunity to paint Romney in a corner,”⁶ said Norm Ornstein of the Conservative American Enterprise Institute. Obama personally mentioned Romney by name in a speech for the first time on Tuesday.

John McCain, one of Romney’s earlier supporters, is concerned about the negative views held by many voters about Romney, and is hopeful that the primary season can be dispensed with. “I’m confident that he will do very well, but the fact is every day that goes by that he’s not in the general election campaign mode is a day lost,” McCain said.⁷

¹ Poll: Romney gained ground in Pennsylvania, Citizens Voice, 4/4/12
² Watch: George Pataki Endorses Mitt Romney, NY Daily News, 3/7/2012
³ Utah’s Sen. Mike Lee urges GOP to back Romney, Salt Lake Tribune, 3/25/2012
⁴ Rubio: Obama’s open mic gaffe prompted timing of Romney endorsement, Daily Caller, 3/29/2012
⁵ Sarah Palin offers tepid endorsement of Mitt Romney on Today Show (Video), Examiner, 4/3/2012
⁶ Obama takes the campaign up a notch, CBS, 4/4/12
⁷ McCain: Romney will win, Santorum campaign ‘basically irrelevant’, LA Times, 4/4/2012
Rick Santorum promises to stay in the race, but struggles to maintain relevance. “We have now reached the point where it’s halftime; half the delegates in this process have been selected,” pointed out Santorum, asking, “Who’s ready to charge out of the locker room in Pennsylvania for a strong second half?” Saying that he “absolutely” planned to stay in the race, Santorum has compared the current primary to the 2008 campaign, arguing that Obama was elected because the Republican establishment “settled” on an inferior, moderate candidate. “I’m saying that, you know, we settled on a candidate who wasn't a strong candidate in 2008, and obviously we had a field out there … But I think in this race, the good thing about this race is that we've had some conservative alternatives to the establishment candidates.” The Democrats in 2008, on the other hand, used their protracted primary to finally decide upon their “best candidate.”

It is doubtful that that optimism will be enough to overcome the growing mainstream perception that the race is nearing its end. Said McCain, “Whether Rick Santorum stays in or not, it’s now basically irrelevant.”

Santorum is still holding out hope, however, of winning Pennsylvania and then Texas, keeping his campaign alive on life support. “The people of Pennsylvania know me,” Santorum said. “All of the negative attacks I think are going to fall on a lot of deaf ears. We’ve got a strong base of support here and we’re going to work very, very hard. Then we're going to get into May. May looks very, very good.”

Ron Paul still speaking his piece. “What is the purpose of stopping?” asked Paul. “It’s still important to try to get people to talk about what they ought to be talking about.” While there is little downside to sticking in the race with that motivation, Paul – a current member of Congress – has missed 136 votes in 2012 while casting only 15. He is not running for a 10th term.

Newt Gingrich still not dropping out. Gingrich, who recently cut a third of his staff, is keeping his campaign alive in the unlikely hope that Romney may not finally receive a majority of the delegates, forcing a brokered convention. “Our campaign is focused on winning a big choice convention this August,” said Gingrich’s communications director. Said Gingrich, “If we get to June 26 and Governor Romney does not have a majority, I think you’ll then have one of the most interesting open conventions in American history.” The chances of this happening have grown infinitesimally small.

---

8 McCain: Romney will win, Santorum campaign 'basically irrelevant', LA Times, 4/4/2012
9 Santorum downplays Romney's endorsement haul, compares rival to McCain, Fox News, 4/1/2012
10 Santorum downplays Romney's endorsement haul, compares rival to McCain, Fox News, 4/1/2012
12 Santorum: "May looks very, very good", CBS, 4/4/2012