Santorum's Last Stand
April 4, 2012

G. Terry Madonna & Michael L. Young

It wasn’t supposed to happen this way. The Pennsylvania primary scheduled for April 24th was to be Rick Santorum’s triumphal return - celebrating his resurgence in national politics after his crushing defeat just six years earlier for re-election to the senate.

It’s not turning out that way.

Instead Santorum is finding himself ensnared in a nasty dog fight with Mitt Romney that is looking more and more like Santorum’s last stand. Out spent by Romney by margins sometimes approaching ten to one, trailing badly in pledged delegates, and lacking Romney’s powerful ground operation, Santorum cannot afford to lose his home state. Yet three polls now show the race to be competitive--Franklin & Marshall, Mercyhurst and Quinnipiac find that Santorum’s once daunting lead over Romney has been erased in less than a month.

Why? What has happened to the once promising campaign that promised to derail Romney’s presidential hopes and set up a classic conservative versus moderate battle within the GOP?

A close look at the last month of the campaign reveals the painful contours of the Santorum slide. Altogether five factors have converged to turn Pennsylvania into what could be Santorum’s last stand. They are:

1. Santorum’s foray into social issues badly misfired hurting him among independents.

Santorum’s odyssey into reproductive health and related social issues, often delivered in a provocative manner has cost him supporters especially among independents and moderates. In Pennsylvania that means large stretches of the state, including Philadelphia, the vote rich Philly suburbs and the Lehigh Valley might well snub his candidacy. Worse perhaps, the animus engendered by Santorum’s frequently controversial remarks has tended to take his focus off jobs and the economy. Santorum, in a phrase has consistently gone off message in the last month and it is costing him.

2. The once vaunted Santorum surge is sagging badly.

From late January through February, Santorum rode a genuine momentum as powerful as any seen in a Republican primary in a generation. He won several important states including Mississippi and Alabama and had sizable early leads in key Electoral College swing states like Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. But he subsequently lost all these states and with it the air went out of much of the Santorum balloon. No Republican can win the presidency who doesn’t win a majority of these battleground states in the fall.

3. Romney’s huge financial advantage is overwhelming

Romney has regularly out spent Santorum by margins of 7 to 1 and higher, sometimes much higher. In one state it was estimated the Romney edge was a stupendous 70 to 1. Just one of Romney’s Super PACs has spent almost 40 million dollars, according to the Los Angeles Times, most on negative ads. During the Wisconsin
race, Santorum achieved a symbolic victory by holding Romney to a mere 4 to 1 spending edge. No candidate in the age of media politics can long withstand a barrage of this magnitude.

- **Romney has yet seriously to campaign in Pennsylvania**
Romney has now drawn within striking distance of Santorum in Pennsylvania without serious campaigning. His stunning financial advantage combined with a growing campaign operation in the state means his support will inevitably swell when he does begin to campaign, spending time and money in the state. In other mega states like Illinois, Michigan and Ohio, Santorum started with substantial leads only to see them wither away as the Romney campaign gathered steam. That’s likely to happen in Pennsylvania, too.

- **Many, perhaps most Republicans, want the race to end**
The GOP race has become nasty personal, filled with vitriol and – worst of all – helping no one but the Obama campaign. In just a few months Obama has gone from a long shot for re-election to holding national leads over both Romney (4%) and Santorum (8%). Together with an improving economy, Obama’s prospects to win reelection have improved markedly. At the same time all the Republican candidates, save Ron Paul have seen their negatives rise, always ominous in an election year. The lesson seems only too clear; the longer the GOP race continues the harder to beat Obama in the fall.

Santorum’s rise and fall carries with it enough paradox to launch a Russian novel or two. It’s hard to miss the irony that a campaign beginning in a defeat for reelection to the senate six years ago could end with another defeat six years later in the same state. Perhaps the supreme twist, though, is that Pennsylvania’s chronically late voting Republicans may finally get a primary that matters. Enigmatically however, they get it only by dumping the first Pennsylvanian to seriously run for president in almost half a century.

------------

*Politically Uncorrected™* is published twice monthly, and previous columns can be viewed at [http://politics.fandm.edu](http://politics.fandm.edu). The opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of any institution or organization with which they are affiliated. This article may be used in whole or part only with appropriate attribution. Copyright © 2012 Terry Madonna and Michael Young.