

Civil war: Mitt Romney excoriates Republican frontrunner Donald Trump

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Mitt Romney, the 2012 Republican presidential nominee, assailed current GOP front-runner Donald Trump on Thursday, questioning his honesty and arguing his nomination would guarantee that Democrat Hillary Clinton becomes the next president. Photo: AP
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THE Republican Party has descended into open civil war between Donald Trump's fans and the people who refuse to support him.

This morning, 2012 presidential nominee Mitt Romney savaged Trump in a speech at the University of Utah, saying he's "playing the American public for suckers".

It's the clearest sign yet that anti-Trump forces will not fall in line behind their party's frontrunner if he goes on to become the nominee.

Donald Trump needs to win over voters who now say they'll never support him.

Republican candidate Donald Trump has made headlines globally with his upfront one-liners.

Romney didn't endorse any of Trump's rivals, but he did echo their attacks on the real estate mogul in the most comprehensive rebuttal to Trump's candidacy we've seen so far - leading Trump himself to respond with a vulgar insult.

"Let me put it plainly. If we Republicans choose Donald Trump as our nominee, the prospects for a safe and prosperous future are greatly diminished," Romney said. "I understand the anger Americans feel today. In the past, our presidents have channelled that anger, and forged it into resolve, into endurance and high purpose, and into the will to defeat the enemies of freedom. Our anger was transformed into energy directed for good.

"Mr Trump is directing our anger for less than noble purposes. He creates scapegoats of Muslims and Mexican immigrants, he calls for the use of torture and for killing the innocent children and family members of terrorists. He cheers assaults on protesters. He applauds the prospect of twisting the Constitution to limit first amendment freedom of the press. This is the very brand of anger that has led other nations into the abyss.

"Here's what I know. Donald Trump is a phony, a fraud. His promises are as worthless as a degree from Trump University. He's playing the American public for suckers — he gets a free ride to the White House and all we get is a lousy hat."

Romney took aim at Trump from every angle, stringing together criticisms of his policies, personality and trustworthiness.

"There are a number of people who claim that Mr. Trump is a conman, a fake. There is indeed evidence of that. Mr. Trump has changed his positions not just over the years, but over the course of the campaign," he said. "His domestic policies would lead to recession. His foreign policies would make America and the world less safe. He has neither the temperament nor the judgment to be president. And his personal qualities would mean that America would cease to be a shining city on a hill.

“The President of the United States has long been the leader of the free world. The president and yes the nominees of the country’s great parties help define America to billions of people. All of them bear the responsibility of being an example for our children and grandchildren,” he said. “Imagine your children and grandchildren acting the way he does.

“Watch how he responds to my speech today. Will he talk about our policy differences or will he attack me with every imaginable low road insult? This may tell you what you need to know about his temperament, his stability and his suitability to be president.”

When Trump did respond to Romney during a rally in Maine, he chose to focus on the 2012 nominee’s failure to defeat Barack Obama.

“He was very nasty (in his speech). I mean, I thought he was a better person than that,” Trump said. “Mitt was a disaster as a candidate. He let us down. We should have won ... He’s a choke artist, he choked ... He got killed. He got decimated in the election.”

You get the picture. Trump also pointed out, correctly, that Romney actively sought his endorsement during the primaries four years ago.

“I could have said Mitt, drop to your knees. He would have dropped to his knees,” Trump said, to laughter from his supporters. Yep, that’s a blowjob joke folks.

Finally, he mocked Romney for deciding not to run for president again this time. “I’ll tell you the real reason he chickened out. It was me,” he said.

Those insults all echoed pre-emptive criticisms Trump had made of Romney earlier in the day. “Mitt Romney is a stiff,” Trump told America’s Today show before the speech. “Mitt Romney will not get elected. Mitt Romney failed twice and really failed last time. He was going against a president that should have been beaten.

“He begged me four years ago for my endorsement — I mean literally begged me. “And he’s a failed candidate. I mean, frankly I backed him. He failed. He was a horrible candidate.”

Trump did indeed endorse Romney four years ago, and the former Massachusetts governor was very happy about it at the time.

“There are some things that you just can’t imagine happening in your life,” Romney said. “This is one of them. Being in Donald Trump’s magnificent hotel and having his endorsement is a delight. I’m so honoured and pleased to have his endorsement.”

The pair’s relationship has clearly soured since then though. Romney has been among the most outspoken critics of Trump in recent weeks, calling on the Republican frontrunner to release his tax returns, which he says could contain a “bombshell”.

Trump’s campaign has hit back by deriding Romney as part of the Republican “establishment”, which it says is trying to stop the voters’ will from being carried out. “Mitt Romney is trying to stay relevant. He has no relevance anymore,” Trump’s campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, told CNN today.

But there’s a real problem for Trump here. According to the exit polls from Super Tuesday, three-quarters of the Republicans who voted for a candidate other than Trump said they would not be satisfied if he became the nominee. Some of those voters would undoubtedly fall into line anyway — but not all of them.

This week, Bloomberg columnist Megan McArdle gathered feedback from hundreds of lifelong Republicans who say they could never vote for Trump, even if it meant a victory for Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders in the general election. "I think a Donald Trump nomination would destroy the conservative cause. I think Hillary Clinton in the White House would be a disaster, but is far preferable to Trump," said one reader. "I agree with Donald Trump on virtually nothing and don't consider him a Republican. Not only won't I vote for him in a general election, but I'll vote for either Hillary or Sanders and will do so without a tad of guilt of voting for a Democrat," said another.

And anonymous voters aren't the only ones voicing their disgust at the state of the race. Some elected Republicans, such as Senator Ben Sasse, have made it clear they will never support Trump as their nominee.

Much of the conservative media is in open revolt against the frontrunner as well. Take this example from National Review's David French. "There was a time when I was more amused than appalled by Trump," French writes. "Those days are long past. The crucible of the campaign has revealed him to be petty, malicious and vindictive. He isn't as bad as his critics feared — he's worse."

If he does claim the nomination, Trump will need to win over these people — or find enough new voters to replace them.

MITT HAPPENS: ROMNEY'S HARSH ATTACKS

On domestic policy

"If Donald Trump's plans were ever implemented, the country would sink into a prolonged recession." "His proposed 35 per cent tariff-like penalties would instigate a trade war that would raise prices for consumers, kill export jobs and lead entrepreneurs and businesses to flee America. "His tax plan, along with his refusal to reform entitlements and to honestly address spending would balloon the deficit and the national debt."

On Trump's business empire

"But wait, you say, isn't he a huge business success that knows what he's talking about? No, he isn't. "His bankruptcies have crushed small businesses and the men and women who worked for them. "He inherited his business, he didn't create it.

"Whatever happened to Trump Airlines? How about Trump University? And then there's Trump Magazine and Trump Vodka and Trump Steaks and Trump Mortgage. A business genius he is not."

On foreign policy

"Trump's bombast is already alarming our allies and fuelling the enmity of our enemies. Insulting all Muslims will keep many of them from fully engaging us in the urgent fight against IS. "What he said about Syria and IS has to go down as the most ridiculous and dangerous idea of the campaign season. Let IS take out Assad, he said, and then we can pick up the remnants. Think about that. Let the most dangerous terror organisation the world has ever known take over a country? This is recklessness in the extreme.

"Donald Trump tells us that he is very, very smart. I'm afraid that when it comes to foreign policy he is very, very not smart."

On Trump's flip-flopping

“Dishonesty is Trump’s hallmark. He claimed he had spoken clearly and boldly against going into Iraq. Wrong. He spoke in favour of invading Iraq. He said he saw thousands of Muslims in New Jersey celebrating 9/11. Wrong, he saw no such thing.”

On Trump’s personality

“Think of Donald Trump’s personal qualities, the bullying, the greed, the showing off, the misogyny, the absurd third grade theatrics.

“Now imagine your children and your grandchildren acting the way he does. Will you welcome that? Haven’t we seen before what happens when people in prominent positions fail the basic responsibility of honorable conduct? We have, and it always injures our families and our country.”

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