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Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney, right, walked yesterday with his wife, Ann, son Josh, center, son Craig, directly behind Josh, and some of his grandchildren at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines, Iowa. Almost 100 members of the Romney clan are in Iowa this weekend.

Romney kin converge on Iowa

The GOP candidate has dozens of family members helping out for today's straw poll

By Michael Luo
New York Times

AMES, Iowa >> They have driven here from California, Ohio, Canada and Texas; flown from Michigan, Utah and Florida. There are aunts, uncles, cousins, second cousins, in-laws, nieces, nephews and grandchildren.

At last count, 96 members of the Romney clan, a veritable army, have arrived here over the last few days to help out at today's Republican straw poll, bolstering what is already a huge ground operation for the event that far outstrips any other campaign.

"Iowa has a big voice to be heard when it comes to selecting the nominee of our party," Romney said Wednesday in Bettendorf, according to the Associated Press. "I care very much about this process."

Leading the troops will be

Romney's five adult sons, who have come to occupy a prominent place in their father's campaign, giving speeches, hosting fundraisers, blogging and even weighing in on strategy, while helping their father paint a contrast to some of his Republican rivals.

It is Romney's family portrait that lends him credibility in his appeals to all-important social conservative voters here.

Romney almost always mentions his wife of nearly 40 years, Ann, their five sons and 10 grandchildren on campaign stops, often just before plunging into a spiel about strengthening the American family and the importance of "family values." Campaign appearances often feature him, his wife, a son or two and even a grandchild.

In contrast, former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, the current Republican front-runner, has been married three times, and his two children are not campaigning with him.

Of the hordes of Romneys here, perhaps nobody plays a more central role than Tagg Romney, 37, the eldest. He has become one of the campaign's

most visible representatives in the spin room. He is part of his father's inner circle, usually the quickest to offer a critique about how the candidate performed at an event.

In campaign staff meetings he acts as a representative of his father, often pressing others for the kind of additional data to back up their decisions that he anticipates his father will want.

Josh Romney, 31, a real estate developer in Salt Lake City, has spent the summer visiting all 99 counties in Iowa.

Matt Romney, 35, a real estate developer in San Diego, has concentrated on fundraising, tapping his business contacts from Harvard Business School (three of the five Romney sons graduated from the institution).

Craig Romney, 26, a music producer at an advertising agency in New York, will take an extended leave from his company to join the campaign full time.

Ben Romney, 29, a third-year medical student, has been unable to immerse himself in the campaign because of his schedule.