



Charlie Nebergall/Associated Press
Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney and his wife, Ann, flip pork chops yesterday at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines.

Presidential candidate tours family in bid to win social conservatives Romneys invade Iowa

By Michael Luo
The New York Times

AMES, Iowa — They have driven here from California, Ohio, Canada and Texas, 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 in Iowa over the last few days to help out at today's Republican straw poll, tabulating what is already a huge ground operation for the event that far exceeds any other campaign.

Leading the troops will be the five adult sons of former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, who have come to occupy a prominent place in their father's presidential campaign — giving speeches, hosting fund-raisers, blogging and even weighing in on strategy, while helping their father paint a contrast to some of his GOP rivals.

It is Mr. Romney's family poise that lends his credibility in his appeals to all-important social conservative voters in Iowa, many of whom are still grappling with whether to believe that he is really one of them, in terms of their positions, such as support for abortion rights.

Mr. Romney almost always mentions his high school sweetheart and wife of nearly 30 years, Ann, their five sons and 18 grandchildren on a campaign stop — 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 W. Giuliani, the current Republican front-runner, has been married three times, and his two children are not campaigning with him. (Earlier this week, his daughter, Carolina, drew headlines when it was revealed that she had expressed support online for Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, running second now among Democratic presidential contenders.)

Of the horde of Romneys in Iowa now, perhaps nobody plays a more central role than Tagg Romney, 27, the eldest son. At debates, he has become one of the campaign's most visible representatives in the spin room. He is also part of his father's inner circle, usually the quickest to offer an unfiltered 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 recognizes his father will want.

He is also the one that many in the campaign turn to when they need to deliver difficult advice to Mr. Romney, make him on a strategic decision — or even to tell him not to use the phrase "pull out," as he did twice during the GOP debate in New Hampshire.

In February, when the campaign's budget committee decided it needed to allocate more money to building up staff on the ground in the early voting states — while Mitt Romney seemed to save more for last-minute advertising — it was Tagg Romney that they turned to for help in convincing his father to change his mind.

Even so, those inside the campaign said Tagg sees his connection to his father loosely. His other main fixations, like his love of head cheerleader for marcel, organization softball, beach football and, most recently, a staff tennis tournament, with the championship held at the court at his parents' house.

It was Tagg Romney who orga-

nized the extended family's Iowa effort this week for the Straw Poll being held today. The Romney clan will be greeting the people arriving from across the state on campaign buses and escorting them to the voting booths. Even the grandchildren have been tasked to offer a hearty Romney welcome.

The most visible emblem of the sons' involvement in the campaign has become the "Mitt Mobile," an RV purchased on eBay by Mr. Romney that Josh Romney, 31, a real estate developer in Salt Lake City, has spent the summer driving to all 99 counties in Iowa. It will now make its way across the country.

Mitt Romney, 55, 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, is about to take an extended leave from his company to join the campaign full time. He has visited the most states of all the sons, since 17 is all.

Only Ben Romney, 26, a third-year medical student, has been unable to "immerse himself" in the campaign because of his schedule.

The Romney sons, who write about their dad and their travels on the campaign's blog, The Five Brothers, have drawn mocking on the Internet for chiding posts and somehow appearing too wholesome.

Ann Romney was tarred during her husband's 1994 campaign for the U.S. Senate, when she said she and her husband had never argued. And just this week, the candidate drew criticism when he defended his sons' decision not to serve in the armed forces, and added, "One of the ways my sons are showing support for our nation is helping me get elected."

The brothers declare that their family is hardly perfect, but describe a childhood steeped in Mormonism and family. Days would start with Scripture lessons at a neighbor's house before school. Sundays were devoted to church. Mondays evenings typically featured one of the parents giving a short Scripture lesson.

This is not the first time that relatives have pitched in on a campaign.

In Mr. Romney's unsuccessful race for the Senate in 1994 in Massachusetts, his father, former Michigan Gov. George Romney, a longtime presidential hopeful himself, was by then in his 80s, led 10 family members who descended upon the state to stump. This time, there are just more of them.

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