



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on June 6, 2011

## Exploring Done, Santorum Will Run

After months of travel and living out of a suitcase, after endless days and nights on the exploratory committee trail, there is, for some Republican presidential hopefuls, no place like Good Morning America on ABC-TV. On Monday morning, former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum chose the popular morning news and talk show as the venue for his first “formal” announcement of candidacy, as had Ron Paul, Tim Pawlenty and Newt Gingrich before him. Though Santorum’s “official” campaign kickoff was set for the small Pennsylvania town where his immigrant grandfather once worked.



His announcement followed by a day his symbolic victory in a straw poll among conservative activists in New Hampshire, where he took 37 percent of 120 votes. His nearest competitor, Representative Ron Paul of Texas, drew 12 percent.

At a time when jobs, jobs, and jobs appear to be the three top issues in the 2012 campaign, Santorum is known primarily as a “values” conservative, one who’s opposition to abortion, “gay” marriage and other “hot-button” social issues puts him in roughly the Huckabee-Palin-Bachmann wing of the Grand Old Party, as opposed to, say, the Romney-Pawlenty-Gingrich economic conservative wing, the liberal-to-moderate Giuliani branch or the libertarian Ron Paul-Gary Johnson wing. Palin is still hovering on the sidelines, while Bachmann is expected to announce her candidacy later this month. Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, who was among the last standing against eventual nominee John McCain in 2008, announced last month he would not run, but has said in the last few days he may reconsider.

But Santorum waded into the economic wars as well, saying House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, (R-Wisconsin) has proposed budget cuts that don’t go far or deep enough. Emulating Pawlenty’s bold stands in promising to take hold of the political “third rail” on Social Security and Medicare reform, Santorum said, “Not even Paul Ryan and his budget now has the temerity to go after Social Security.”

Ryan’s plan to cut \$4 trillion in federal spending over the next decade may include the “third rail” of Republicans, but it could be a lifeline to struggling Democrats, trying to stay afloat at a time when the economy continues to defy Obama’s and the Democrats’ stimulus plans and when, with the Libyan bombing campaign, America’s roster of winless wars has come to match in futility the stagnation of a “jobless recovery.” In the recent special election in New York’s 26th District, Republican candidate Jane Corwin eagerly embraced the Ryan plan, calling it “a terrific first step.” It turned out to be a step off a cliff for Corwin, the early favorite, who nonetheless lost to Democrat Kathy Hochul in a solidly Republican upstate district. Democrats hammered at the Ryan plan and Corwin’s endorsement of it and the economic hardship it would allegedly cause. Even among self-identified conservatives, 53 percent registered their disapproval of the plan. The feature that has made it politically radioactive is the plan to phase out the current Medicare system for one in which seniors would be given vouchers to buy



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health insurance in a comparatively free market. The plan has become controversial among Republicans as well as Democrats, especially since former Speaker of the House and current Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich referred to it as “right wing social engineering.” That brought the Republican big tent down on Gingrich, who was accused of cutting Ryan off at the knees and disrupting the party’s unity at a time when Republicans are eager to unite behind an alternative to the Obama budget. Gingrich has also referred to the Ryan plan as one that “spends too much” and appears conservative only in comparison with the White House plan, which spends “absurdly too much.”

The problem for conservatives is that, while many say Medicare as it now exists will not be able to withstand the weight of mounting federal debt, most Americans, including most conservatives, have become so accustomed to the program as a part of American life that they no longer see it as a manifestation of “big government.” Like Social Security, minimum wage, and child labor laws, it has become a part of the social and economic life of the nation.

But Santorum appeals to conservatives who not only respond to the fiscal conservatism frequently espoused by Republican candidates and only rarely practiced by Republicans in office, he also motivates “Culture warriors” with his “old-time religion” on “family values” issues. A Roman Catholic with 7 children, Santorum, 53, is a staunch opponent of abortion, the “gay” rights agenda especially same-sex marriage and other politically sensitive initiatives like cloning and the promotion of a secular education that promotes the idea of sexual liberation. At the same time, he is an opponent of government policies and regulations that inhibit free enterprise and individual initiative and responsibility for Americans.

“If you’re going to sum up the mission of America, it’s to make sure each and every person is free,” [he said during Monday’s kickoff rally](#) in Somerset, Pennsylvania.

On foreign policy, Santorum, who was a U.S. Senator from January 1995 to January 2007, comes down on the side of the hawks, though he has sometimes been critical of President Obama’s decision to intervene with air strikes in Libya’s civil war. At other times, he has expressed support for the mission, though usually in terms that suggest approval of actions taken by a Republican past President than for Obama. On a radio talk show in Des Moines, Iowa recently, [Santorum said the nation should follow the example of Ronald Reagan in Libya](#).

“Ronald Reagan bombed Libya,” the former Pennsylvania Senator recalled. “If you want to be Reaganesque, it seems the path is pretty clear here.”

[Santorum also took issue](#) with Arizona Sen. John McCain when McCain said the finding and killing of Osama bin Laden was not the result of information gained by using harsh interrogation techniques on captured prisoners, often referred to as torture.

“Everything I’ve read shows that we would not have gotten this information as to who (Bin Laden) was if it had not been gotten information from people who were subject to enhanced interrogation,” Santorum said. McCain, the Republican candidate for President in 2008, had argued to the contrary on the Senate floor and in an op ed article in the *Washington Post*. But Santorum said McCain “doesn’t understand how enhanced interrogation works.”

McCain, who was captured in a mission over North Vietnam in 1967, endured five-and-a-half years of captivity and interrogation at the hands of his Communist captors.

When asked for a response to the comments made by Santorum, a McCain spokesman was reported to have replied, “Who?”



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