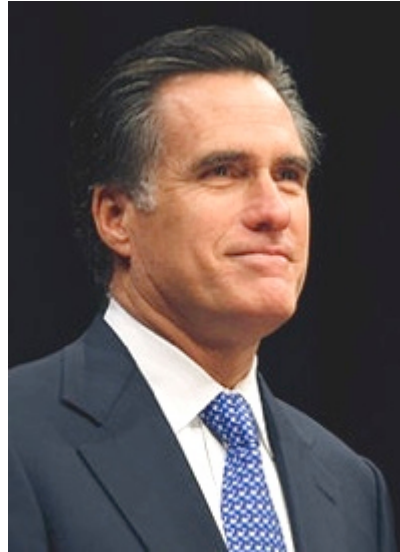




Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on December 15, 2011

Worried Mitt Goes Negative on “Zany” Newt

Mitt Romney, once seen as the all-but-prohibitive favorite for the Republican presidential nomination, has personally gone on the offensive against rival candidate Newt Gingrich, who now leads Romney in some polls and has been gaining on him in others. In an interview with the *New York Times* on Wednesday, Romney called the former Speaker of the House “zany” and accused him of attacking free enterprise.



“He lashes out at me and lashes out at the free enterprise system,” Romney said. Gingrich has called on Romney to return the money he made from his former company Baine Capital, a venture capital firm that under Romney bought out smaller companies and, in some cases, laid off employees or shut down businesses altogether and sold the acquired assets at a substantial profit. Gingrich was responding to a Romney charge that he should return the \$1.6 million he received as a consultant to Freddie Mac, the government-created housing finance agency, whose bad loans and subsequent meltdown contributed heavily to the financial crisis of 2008. The dispute led Robert Reich, Secretary of Labor in the Clinton administration, to wonder on his blog if both Romney and Gingrich have been “channeling their inner progressives.”

In his interview with the *Times*, Romney suggested Gingrich doesn’t understand the economy.

“He’s a great historian,” Romney said. “If we need a historian leading the country, I’m sure people would find that attractive. I actually think you need someone who actually understands the economy leading the country.” Gingrich, whose combative style throughout his career has often earned him labels such as “polarizing” and “divisive,” was described by Romney as “zany” for some of his past policy proposals.

“Zany is not what we need in a president,” Romney said. “Zany is great in a campaign. It’s great on talk radio. It’s great in print, it makes for fun reading, but in terms of a president, we need a leader, and a leader needs to be someone who can bring Americans together.” [Salon.com columnist Joan Walsh](#), while no admirer of Romney, suggested the description of Gingrich as “zany” was too kind and showed Romney’s mind to be mired in the 1950s.



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"Gidget was zany," Walsh wrote. "Gingrich is a dangerous huckster, who will apparently say anything to get elected."

Romney has previously left it up to campaign surrogates, principally former Governor John Sununu of New Hampshire and former Senator Jim Talent of Missouri, to describe Gingrich as erratic and self-aggrandizing. As recently as last Friday [Romney attempted](#) to distance himself from those characterizations.

"You know I can't write a script for Governor Sununu or anybody else," he said. "I can tell you that people who worked with Speaker Gingrich have their own views and will express those views." Asked about an ad aired by a political action committee supporting Romney which described Gingrich's life and career burdened by heavy political "baggage," Romney said, "I don't have any comment on anything that PACs are going to do or say." An ad run on Iowa TV stations, however, shows Romney in a debate setting, saying that he has been "married to the same woman" for 42 years and has "been in the same church my entire life."

"Is this a less-than-subtle jab at GOP presidential rival Newt Gingrich over his three marriages and his conversion to Roman Catholicism?" asked David Mark on [Politico.com](#). "Is this an effective tactic or sign of desperation?"

While a poll published in the *New Hampshire Journal* last month showed Romney and Gingrich in a statistical dead heat in New Hampshire, a Rasmussen poll released this week showed Romney holding a double-digit lead over the former Georgia congressman, 33 to 22 percent, with Rep. Ron Paul of Texas edging up on Gingrich with 18 percent. Even a narrow victory for Romney in the first-in-the-nation primary might be considered an upset, given the early expectations for the former Governor of the neighboring state of Massachusetts, who has a summer home in New Hampshire. In Iowa, whose caucuses take place a week before New Hampshire's January 10 primary, a Public Policy Polling survey released Tuesday showed Romney in third place with 16 percent, while Gingrich and Paul were in a virtual tie, with 22 percent for Gingrich and 21 percent for Paul.

The effort by the Romney campaign to highlight Gingrich as erratic or unstable might also be seen as an attempt to take attention away from zigzags in Romney's own political career which have earned him a reputation as a "flip-flopper." Romney has been widely criticized by conservatives within the party for putting in place a health plan as Governor of Massachusetts that is strikingly similar to the federal "ObamaCare" program that he and all the other GOP candidates want to repeal. Now an opponent of abortion, Romney was an ardent defender of a "woman's right to choose" as Governor and as a candidate for the U.S. Senate in 2004, when he also promised to be a more effective advocate for "gay rights" than his opponent, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy. When the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage, Romney called for a constitutional amendment to overturn the decision. Yet his Attorney General in May 2004 ordered town and city clerks to issue marriage licenses to "Party A" and "Party B," though the state Legislature still had not changed the law to accommodate the court ruling.

On the same day that Romney described Gingrich as "zany," he announced that former U.S. Senate candidate Christine O'Donnell of Delaware has endorsed the Romney campaign. O'Donnell, a Tea Party favorite in her unsuccessful 2010 campaign, had admitted to dabbling in witchcraft as a teenager and introduced herself in a campaign ad by saying, "I am not a witch."

"Hey, if Christine O'Donnell supports Mitt Romney, this guy has the kind of principles Tea Partiers can



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be happy with," Romney said.



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