

## Now That It's Romney ...

April 11, 2012 - [Bryan Schwartzman, Jewish Exponent Staff](#)

On a day last week when both former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney and former U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum brought their presidential campaigns to the Keystone State, one might have expected activists at a Philadelphia gathering of the Republican Jewish Coalition to have a serious case of primary fever.

But even before Santorum dropped out of the race this week, the mood inside the Center City conference was in fact quite cool, at least concerning the Republican primary on April 24. Mention President Barack Obama, however, and tempers grew quite hot.

Hana Brem, a new RJC member, seemed to speak for many in her party when she said that it's time to look ahead to the general election in November.

It's time, she said, to work toward unseating Obama -- and somehow try to convince the bulk of Jews to dump their historic allegiance to the Democratic Party.

"Romney is a great communicator and Obama is a great divider," added Brem, an interpreter who recently moved to Haverford from Tampa, Fla.

She also pointed out that while Obama has had a famously frosty relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Romney and Netanyahu are old friends. In the mid 1970s, the two worked together at the Boston Consulting Group, according to recently published reports.

For Jewish Republicans, the focus is squarely on denying Obama a second term in office and finding a way to flip enough Jewish voters to make a difference in battleground states like Pennsylvania.

The strategy is to continue to hammer away at Obama's record on Israel, but the Jewish pitch, say insiders, will also concentrate on the economy. Republican critics charge that Obama has pushed the country closer toward a European brand of state socialism, so the campaign, they say, should focus on the proper role of the federal government in managing the economy and overseeing society.



*At a 2008 campaign event in Florida, Mitt Romney posed with supporter Hana Brem and her son David.*

"The economic issues are what people should be focusing on, period," said Caren Sokolow, an RJC member from Cherry Hill, N.J. Sokolow, a retired audiologist, is now working for the congressional campaign of Gregory Horton, a Republican challenging U.S. Rep. Rob Andrews (D-N.J.).

"If we falter in this nation economically, then the social issues don't matter and nothing else matters," Sokolow said, addressing why a pro-choice voter should vote for a pro-life candidate such as Romney.

The RJC, always a busy organization locally, has been especially active in recent weeks. Two weeks ago, the group hosted a training seminar for activists in Blue Bell, focusing on social networking and more traditional forms of grass-roots political advocacy. Last week, the group brought in a Cato Institute scholar, Ilya Shapiro, who argued that much of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Obama's signature legislative accomplishment, is unconstitutional.

As an organization, the RJC is not yet able to get behind Romney since it doesn't make primary endorsements.

"Logistically, it looks like it's going to be Romney, but we are not saying anything until all the voters have spoken," said Scott Feigelstein, director of the group's Philadelphia/Southern New Jersey chapter.

In recent weeks, Democrats have dispatched two national leaders, Ira Forman, head of Jewish outreach for the Obama campaign, and U.S. Rep. Deborah Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.), chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee, to the Philadelphia region to jump start Jewish outreach and address the doubts of some Democrats on Obama's Israel policy.

So far, the Romney campaign has not held similar meetings, according to sources. But the Romney campaign, known for its efficiency and attention to detail, has been working on Jewish outreach for more than a year, according to Tevi Troy, a former deputy secretary for Health and Human Services under President George W. Bush, who is advising Romney on both health policy and Jewish issues.

The Romney campaign has also hired an experienced fundraiser, Lisa Spies, to become its director of Jewish outreach.

Troy, who lives in the Washington, D.C. area, has been dispatched to other cities, including New York, to speak on behalf of Romney to Jewish audiences, but so far nothing has been scheduled for Philadelphia.

"A lot of Jews supported President Obama," said Troy, "There has been buyer's remorse. If any Republican is going to see a bump in the Jewish vote, I think Romney is the most likely to do it."

A much talked-about survey of more than 1,000 Jewish voters nationwide, released last week by the Public Religion Research Institute, found that just 7 percent of respondents who voted for Obama in 2008 planned to back a Republican now.

It also found that the GOP's signature campaign proposal -- repealing the recent health care law -- is opposed by nearly six in 10 American Jews.

While many have cited the poll results as good news for Obama, Republicans have also been encouraged that 62 percent of respondents support the president. That number is comparable to Obama's support among Jews at a similar point in 2008, but it is 16 points behind the level of support he got among Jews in the general election.

"Sixty-two percent means Romney is our president," declared Jeff Jubilerer, a Philadelphia-based media strategist and political analyst who worked on Santorum's first Senate campaign in 1994. "That is a number far below what Obama needs and can hope for. That's a huge difference."

To succeed among Jews, he said, Romney needs to avoid a debate on social issues and continue to pound Obama on the economy and his handling of Middle East issues.

Many RJC activists interviewed last week said they are motivated by an intense dislike -- almost a loathing -- of the president and his policies, which mirrors the way many Jewish Democrats felt about Bush.

Matt Pincus, a Chester County resident who owns an elevator installation and repair business, said he just can't understand how anyone could back Obama.

"This administration's support of Israel -- it's outrageous not to support another democracy, not to come out and support Israel," he said.

"I believe that going forward, Mitt Romney will concentrate his attacks on Obama," he said. "The other candidates are bitter, vindictive. Their only goal is to hurt Romney."

At least one RJC member in the room, Janet Cantor of Northeast Philadelphia, was disappointed that the competitive primary season appears to be just about over.

"I wanted the primary to go on forever," said Cantor. "The longer it goes on, the less time Obama and his Pravda media" have to destroy the Republican nominee.