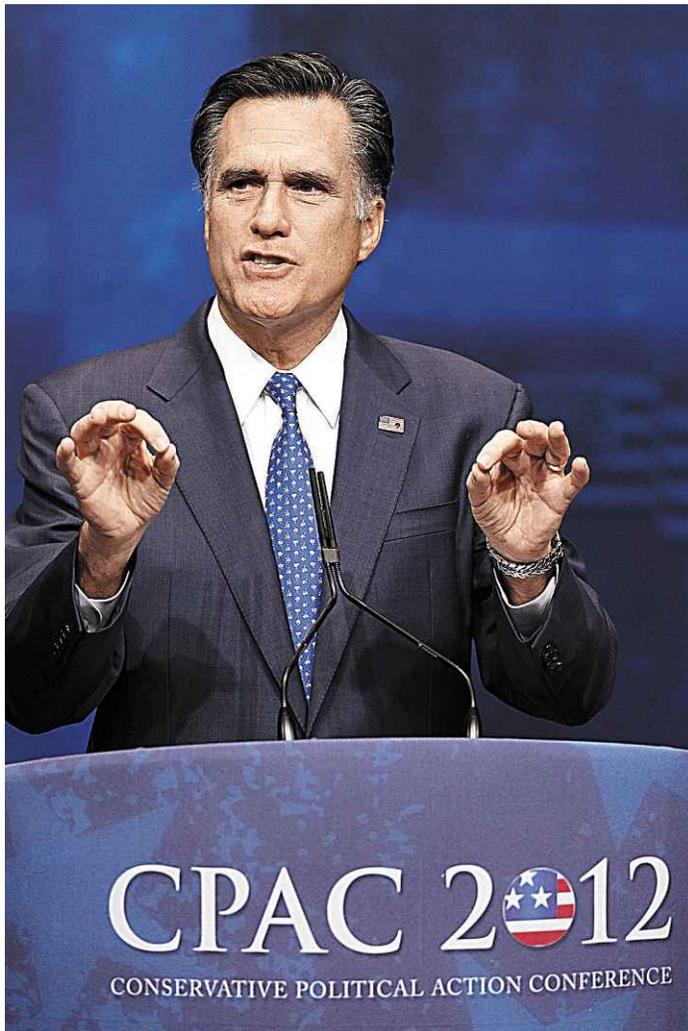


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**“We conservatives aren’t just proud to cling to our guns and to our religion. We are also proud to cling to our Constitution.”**

MITT ROMNEY

## ROMNEY SAYS HE’S TRUE MAN OF RIGHT

‘Severely conservative’ as governor, he insists; rivals call him moderate

By Bobby Caina Calvan

GLOBE STAFF

WASHINGTON — Three of the Republican Party’s presidential candidates expressed their convictions of faith, family, and freedom as they appealed for support yesterday at a gathering of their party’s conservative wing.

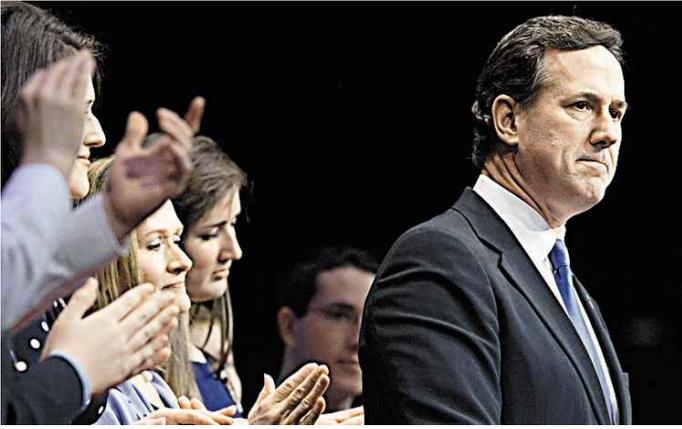
Mitt Romney perhaps had the most at stake in convincing hard-liners of his conservative credentials, after being rebuked this week by his party’s faithful in contests in Colorado, Minnesota, and Missouri. All three states went to Rick Santorum, the former Pennsylvania senator.

Romney used variations of the word conservative some two dozen times in his speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference, which is convening in the nation’s capital.

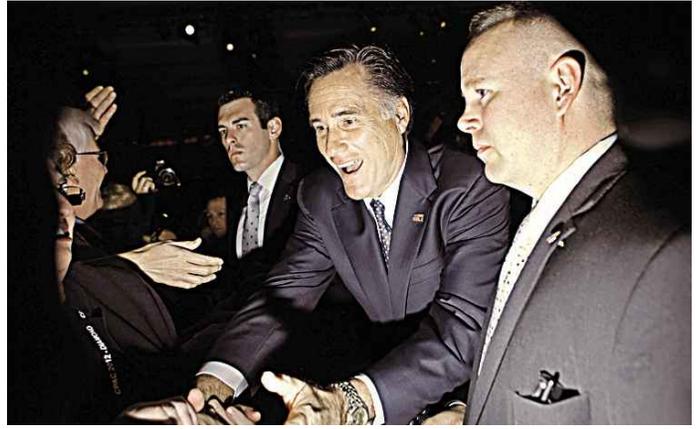
“I know conservatism because I have lived conservatism,” said Romney.

“We conservatives aren’t just proud to

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Rick Santorum, Mitt Romney, and Newt Gingrich spoke to a packed house at a conference that brings grass-roots activists and conse

# Romney tells conservatives he's the true man of the right

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cling to our guns and to our religion," Romney said, referencing an infamous remark by President Obama during the last campaign. "We are also proud to cling to our Constitution," he said to enthusi-

astic applause.

At one point, Romney went slightly off script from his prepared remarks and called himself "a severely conservative Republican governor" in a what he called a "deep blue state."

Santorum and former House

speaker Newt Gingrich were not about to cede the highly prized mantle of conservatism to the former Massachusetts governor, who is trying to regain his footing as the campaign heads to Arizona and Michigan on Feb. 28, and onward to next month's 10-state Super Tuesday. Maine completes its caucuses today.

After his impressive and unexpected sweep in three states, Santorum arrived at the annual conference hoping to convince his party's grass roots to rally behind his resurgent campaign that just weeks ago seemed on its last gasp. Santorum narrowly won in Iowa but faded in the next four contests.

He made his case that Republicans need not abandon their conservative values to win in November. It was an obvious dig at Romney, whose front-runner status is being challenged by Santorum's victories.

"Conservatism did not fail our country," Santorum told the massive gathering. "Conservatives failed conservatism. And we, in fact lost our heart. . . . We listened to the voice that said we had to abandon our principles and values to win. We hear the same voices today.

"As conservatives and Tea Party folks, we are not just a wing of the Republican Party — we are the Republican Party," Santorum said to applause.

Gingrich invoked the name of Ronald Reagan, a hero and icon of the conservative movement, in the opening lines of his speech.

"In all the years that I have worked in this party and in this movement, this is the year to reset this country in a decisive, bold way," Gingrich declared in

an address that won frequent applause and standing ovations. "We need to teach the Republican establishment a lesson. We are determined to rebuild America, not manage its decay."

Despite his losses this week, Romney still has the advantage of a massive war chest — aided by an aggressive and deep-pocketed super PAC — and the ability to quickly mobilize surrogates and his campaign machine.

But independent-minded evangelicals and Tea Party movement stalwarts have shown an unwillingness to rubber stamp the Republican Party's establishment candidate.

Rosemarie Wenzel, who traveled from Chapel Hill, N.C., to attend the conference, walked out of the vast hall as Romney was in mid-speech. She had heard enough, she said. "I think he's saying what he thinks people want to hear," said Wenzel, a Santorum supporter. "I think he'll have trouble convincing people that he has changed."

To many conservatives, Romney is the moderate from liberal Massachusetts, as Gingrich has described him on the stump.

"I think he can overcome that. He has been mischaracterized," said Dane McBride, a Roanoke, Va., physician who roomed with Romney when they were 19 and Mormon missionaries in France.

The Romney campaign yesterday distributed a letter dated Dec. 30, in which nine conservative leaders from Massachusetts defended the former Bay State governor on his conservative record. The group said Romney stood side by side with them "laboring in the trenches of Massachusetts, fighting for the family



JONATHAN ERNST/REUTERS

ervative leaders from across the country to a Washington hotel.

values you and we share.” The group, which included leaders of the state’s Catholic church, said its letter was not intended as an endorsement, but an account of his record in defense of traditional marriage, sex-abstinence education, and religious freedoms, and banning embryo-destroying stem cell research.

In his speech, Romney spoke of his opposition to abortion, his belief that marriage is between a man and a woman, and his experience as a businessman. “As conservatives, we are united by a set of core commitments,” he said. “As we step forward together, now is the time to reaffirm what it means to be a conservative and why this must be our greatest hour.”

Santorum asserted that he would be the best candidate to speak about what he referred to as the failed policies of the Obama administration, particularly on health care and issues of religious freedom. He said that the Massachusetts plan for universal health coverage makes Romney an ineffective messenger to challenge Obama on healthcare.

He also criticized those who supported the 2008 bank bailouts, including Gingrich and Romney, calling the bailouts a precursor to the Dodd-Frank Wall Street regulatory overhaul.

Santorum piled on to the criticism mounting on the Obama administration by conservatives and the Catholic Church over policies that would force insurers, even those provided by religious groups, to provide contraceptives. “It’s not about contraception,” Santorum said. “It’s about government control of your lives, and it has to stop.”

Later in the day, the White House announced a compromise which will not force religious groups to directly provide contraceptives to employees.

The candidates reserved their most stinging comments for Obama. “We will remind Americans that during this president’s term we have seen record high job losses and record home foreclosures. We will not be lectured to on values by the man whose ineptitude and failure has created so much unnecessary pain for our fellow Americans,” Romney said.

Gingrich, whose campaign has faltered since he won the South Carolina primary, added to the criticism by accusing Obama and his administration of lying about foreign policy, of seeking to wage war on organized religion and the Catholic church, and of starving the US economy of the domestic petroleum production it craves. He promised to repudiate “at least 40 percent of his government on the opening day” of a Gingrich administration.

The fourth remaining candidate in the GOP nominating race, Representative Ron Paul of Texas, skipped the event because of unspecified travel constraints, according to his campaign.

Paul’s absence adds some suspense to the convention’s closing straw poll today. The libertarian congressman has won the CPAC straw poll for the last two years. In the three years before that, the winner was Mitt Romney.

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