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Mitt Romney Presidential Candidacy Faces Critical Disadvantage Mormon Religion Unknown and Misunderstood – New 527 Org – RunMittRun.org Created to Address It

San Diego, CA – (July 21, 2006) - Despite ubiquitous youthful Mormon missionaries in white shirts and ties riding their bicycles and knocking on doors, only 9% of one Southern state's population can tell a pollster the basic claim of Mormonism.

In a survey of 600 registered voters in South Carolina conducted July 6-10, only one person in 11 could describe unaided that Mormons believe theirs is the re-established (Mormons say "restored") original Christianity. Later in the survey when a statement to this effect was read to respondents, only 28% said they had heard that claim before.

The survey was conducted by Orange County, California-based Lawrence Research on behalf of a new 527 political organization – RunMittRun.org – created to encourage Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney in his expected bid for the Republican presidential nomination by addressing the "Mormon question" on his behalf.

Romney faces resistance from certain quarters in his quest for the presidency because of one simple fact: He's a Mormon. A recent Bloomberg / L.A. Times poll found that 37% of all American voters said they could not vote for a Mormon for President. South Carolina was not much different with 33% saying the same thing. This compares to 13% of South Carolinians who said they could not vote for an Episcopalian (John McCain's denomination) and 8% who could not vote for a Catholic, Rudy Giuliani's religion.

When filmmaker Mitch Davis, a lifelong Mormon and graduate of Brigham Young University, began hearing that Romney's potential candidacy could be doomed due to lack of support from evangelical Christians, particularly in the South, he began taping man-on-the-street interviews to get a feel for the problem.

"I was absolutely shocked at the level of ignorance about Mormonism I encountered," Davis recounts. "So I decided to form a political organization to do something about it."

"Look at it this way," he continued. "If a day after the Republican convention, Romney turns out to be the party's nominee, how many political commentators will say he got the nomination because he's a Mormon? Zero. But if he loses the campaign for the nomination, how many commentators will say it was because of his religion? Virtually all of them will say it was a major contributor."

"That means Romney's religion is, at least at the beginning, a factor in the political decision. The goal of our 527 – RunMittRun.org - is to take that factor off the table. We're not going to try to sell the Mormon Church – we're going to try to eliminate it as a negative. It will take some heavy lifting," Davis admits, "but I believe voters will give Romney a fair shake if they have accurate information about his religious beliefs."

It will, indeed, take some heavy lifting as other findings of the survey reveal. At the present time, 36% of South Carolinians have a favorable impression of Mormons as people while 40% have an unfavorable impression of them.

The image of the Mormon Church itself is 26% favorable and 46% unfavorable in the state.

The sample of 600 respondents (a margin of error of ± 4.1 percentage points) was read four statements (each of which is false) and asked whether they believed it was true or false:

44% of South Carolinians believe “Mormons practice polygamy.” (Polygamy was banned by the Mormon Church in 1890.) Those who did not know whether the polygamy statement was true or false constituted 21%. Total misunderstood factor: 65%

27% believe “Mormons worship Joseph Smith” and another 45% aren’t sure. (As Davis put it, “Mormons worship Jesus Christ. Period. We no more worship Joseph Smith than the early Christians worshipped Peter.”) Misunderstood factor: 72%

50% believe that “Mormons do not believe the Bible but have the Book of Mormon instead.” Another 20% could not label that statement as either true or false. (Mormons embrace the Bible as holy scripture along with the Book of Mormon.) Misunderstood factor: 70%

25% believe “Mormons are not Christians” and an additional 50% cannot say. (Mormons claim to follow original New Testament Christianity.) Misunderstood factor: 75%

With 65% to 75% of the voting population misunderstanding Mormonism, Davis’ 527 organization – as well as Romney’s candidacy – faces a considerable challenge. But there were other findings that gave hope.

While 33% initially said they could not vote for a Mormon for president, a later question touched again on this topic and this time gave respondents three choices:

From what I know about Mormonism, I could never vote for a Mormon for President (23%).

I have not studied what Mormons believe, so I do not know whether I could vote for a Mormon for President (42%).

From what I know about Mormonism, I could definitely vote for a Mormon for President (23%).

Gary Lawrence, a Stanford-trained Republican pollster Davis commissioned to conduct the poll, said, “While some people will see 23% lining up on the pro-Mormon side and the same percentage on the anti-Mormon side and argue whether that ratio shouldn’t be more like 3:1 or 4:1, don’t ignore the 42% who admit they do not know enough about Romney’s religion to make a judgment as yet. They could be the key to the election.”

Lawrence, also a Mormon like Davis, painted a scenario how Romney could win the South Carolina primary. “The more Mitch Davis’ 527 can put people at ease about Romney’s religion – perhaps in similar ways that Kennedy reassured voters about his Catholicism in 1960 – then Romney’s positions and values, intelligence, speaking ability and other attractive traits will be more salient in their decision and should provide him a good share of that 42% who are withholding judgment about his religion.”

But Lawrence says it’s still a long way from here to there. He asked the Republicans in the sample (258) to imagine that they have decided to vote for either Rudy Giuliani or John McCain, and further to imagine that Mitt Romney were not a Mormon, and then decide whether to switch to Romney or stay with their original vote. About 9% said they would switch to Romney if he were not a Mormon.

While only a hypothetical and not a perfect question in the real world, it indicates that the religion factor could be enough for Romney to lose an election if it were held today. But it also says there are voters in the state who would like to judge and vote for Romney on traits other than his religious affiliation if given enough information.

Davis summarizes: “Republican Christians have rarely had a candidate whose values and lifestyle more closely mirror their own. Mitt Romney is clean and smart and sober and chaste. There’s just this little issue of religious misunderstanding to overcome. If we do our job right, this will be the last time a candidate’s Mormonism is an issue.”

For more information visit: RunMittRun.org.