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[Back to previous page](#)

Mitt Romney out of control

By [Dana Milbank](#), Published: January 4

MANCHESTER, N.H. — If this is Mitt Romney's idea of a victory rally, one shudders to think what would have happened if he had lost the Iowa caucuses.

The day after his impossibly thin eight-vote victory, the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination flew here for a town hall meeting at Manchester Central High School, where he was to bask in the endorsement of his 2008 arch rival, John McCain.

But the senator grimaced when he was introduced, and as Romney delivered his own stump speech, an increasingly impatient McCain pulled up his sleeve and fidgeted with his bracelet. McCain gave his endorsement address without mentioning Romney's Iowa win until the end. "By the way, we forgot to congratulate him on his landslide victory last night," he said, laughing. Romney ignored him.

Then came the questions: First, one from an Occupy Wall Street infiltrator needling the candidate about his belief that "corporations are people." A second questioner wanted to know why Romney flip-flopped on universal health care when he was governor of Massachusetts and why he would not increase health-care costs. Later, a Chinese American woman accused Romney of saying "degrading" things about China, and she complained that "after 20 years of Reagan trickle-down economics, it didn't help me. My tin can is still empty."

Romney sat through most of the ambush with a tight grin and raised eyebrows. At length he attempted to challenge the woman to name a place where income is higher than it is in the United States.

The Occupy Wall Street guy began heckling. "The U.S. has the highest income inequality in the entire developed world!"

Romney tried to regain control. "Excuse me," he said. "You've had your chance."

McCain walked toward the Occupy guy. "Be quiet," he said, menacingly.



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The woman, no longer in possession of a working microphone, began hollering.

“For those who didn’t hear,” Romney offered, “she says she loves this country and don’t put any Asians down. I hope I haven’t put any Asians down.”

The woman’s muffled shouting continued. Romney tried to answer. A baby started to cry.

When the end mercifully came, the candidate gave a final rallying call to “get the White House back.” All but a few rose and put on their coats without applauding.

This undoubtedly was not the victory lap the campaign had in mind. Everything about Romney is controlled, precise and disciplined. Flying from Des Moines to Manchester on Wednesday, he went to his seat right when the pilot turned on the seat-belt sign; many other politicians on charters have been known to remain standing right through landing.

His staff applauded dutifully when he got on his plane (a Miami Air 737 named “Diane” on the fuselage but labeled Hair Force One by others), and he went up and down the row congratulating each staff member with a “nice work” and a “thank you.” The grin he wore when he boarded remained throughout the flight — even when he entered and exited the lavatory.

When he went to the back of the plane to visit the press corps, he made a labored attempt to demonstrate that he was at ease. He noticed an aide’s manifest for the media and pretended that was funny. “Is that right? A seating chart? Ha, ha, ha.”

“What do you think of your eight-vote landslide?” the Associated Press’s Glenn Johnson asked.

“No interviews yet,” the candidate said. “We’ll be back later,” he said, repeating this three times.

(He did not come back later.)

In need of a new subject, Romney looked at the staffer sitting in the row ahead of the press corps. “Is this the referee?” he asked. It wasn’t clear why he regarded this staffer as a referee, but he continued to joke about the demarcation between staff seats and media seats. “The line? The DMZ? Is that it? No, I know what it is: It’s the emergency exit! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. Yeah. Ahh.”

The candidate fielded a couple of questions about his activities on caucus night, and then tried to answer a question about his margin of victory. “Ha, ha. Uh. I think landslides are terrific,” he said. “I just didn’t, uh, see that in last night’s figures. I’m not sure about you. Ha, ha, ha, ha.”

Maybe he should have gotten more sleep.

Driven to Manchester on a bus he dubbed “Landslide Lounge,” Romney continued to wrestle with words when he took the stage at the high school. “What a, uh, big night we had last night, or what a big morning we had, uh, last morning, this morning, in, uh, Iowa,” he began.

Not long after that, he vowed that he would help to promote “businesses big and large.”

2008. Romney smiled politely. It was then time for the disastrous question-and-answer session, beginning with the Occupy activists hectoring Romney about corporations-as-people.

“Hold on!” the candidate volleyed. “You had your turn. Now it’s my turn.”

After Romney’s win in Iowa, it *is* his turn. But he doesn’t seem to be enjoying it.

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