

Major GOP figures stump in Parma

But confrontation among spectators grabs attention

BRANDON BLACKWELL
Plain Dealer Reporter

Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney sent two GOP heavyweights to northern Ohio on Thursday to beat President Barack Obama's similar bus tour to the punch.

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal and former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, traveling on Romney's campaign bus, stopped at Parma's Kentown Plaza to emphasize what they say is a gap between what Obama has promised and what he has delivered.

But a physical clash between Romney supporters and protesters overshadowed the Parma campaign stop by the prominent pair, who are often mentioned as possible running mates for Romney.

The quarrel broke out as soon as Pawlenty took the stage before about 200 people at the strip shopping center.

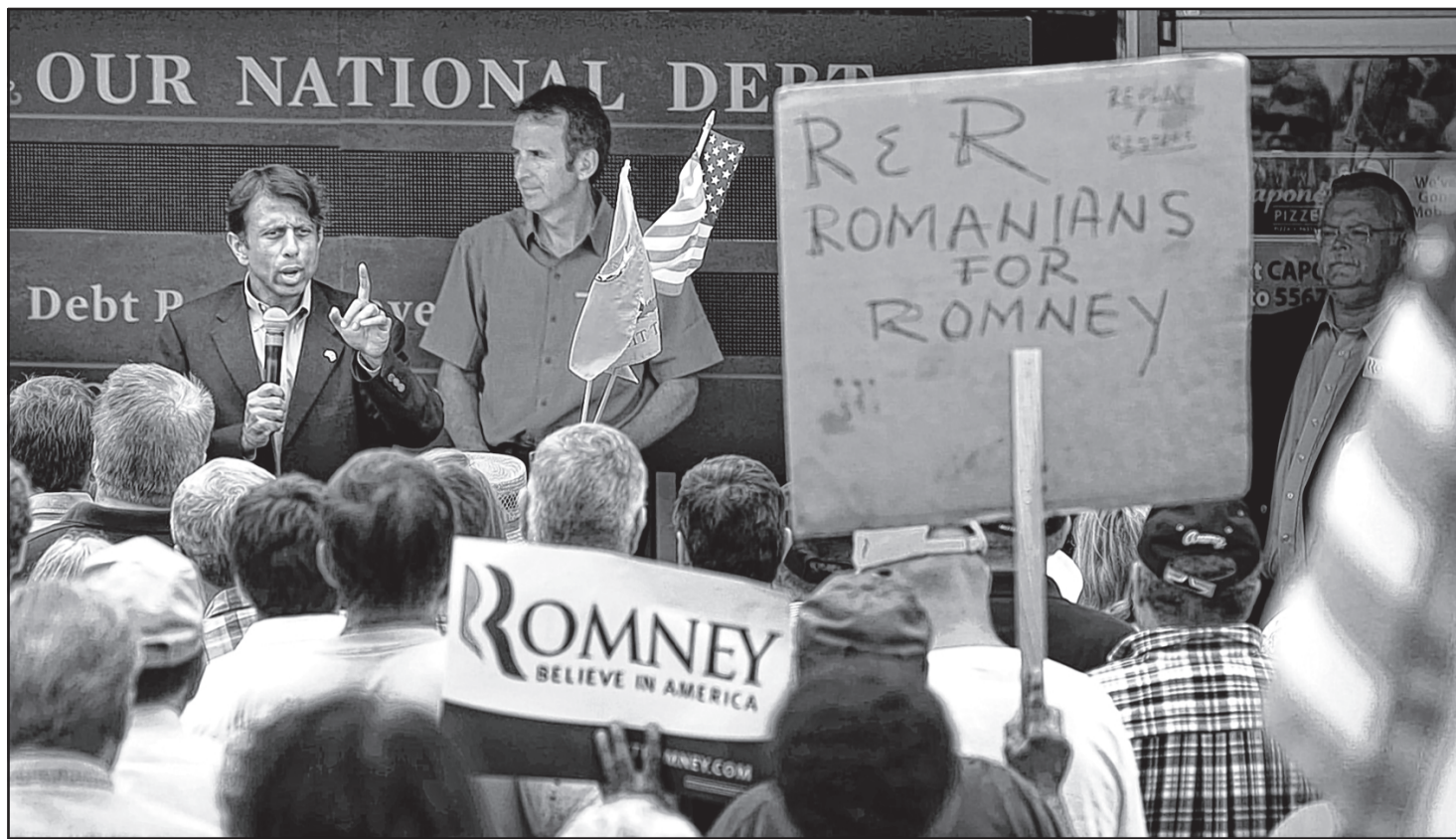
"Pawlenty go home, Pawlenty go home," the protesters chanted over the former governor's speech.

Pawlenty maintained composure and even put his own twist on the chant.

"We should send Barack Obama home," he declared.

At one point, Romney supporter Richard Brysac of Parma confronted protester Al Neal of Canton, who attended with a handful of members of a group called Fight for Fair Economy Ohio.

Brysac, 77, attempted to hush Neal by emptying a bottle of water into the 25-year-old union



SCOTT SHAW | THE PLAIN DEALER

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal criticizes President Barack Obama during a rally for Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney at Kentown Plaza in Parma. Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty joined Jindal in railing against the president during the 30-minute stop.

worker's mouth.

"He seemed thirsty, so I tried to shove the bottle in his mouth," Brysac said. "I thought it was wrong to interfere with [Pawlenty's] freedom of speech."

"I acted out of character, and I apologize if I offended anyone."

When the bottle didn't work, Brysac pulled out his handkerchief and gagged Neal.

Neal removed the handkerchief and continued chanting until the group of protesters was escorted from the rally.

Kentown Plaza is private property.

No police were present. National media picked up the story of the confrontation, which

ONLINE: See a gallery from the Mitt Romney and Barack Obama visits to Ohio Thursday.

tinyurl.com/pdphotoblog

Cuyahoga County Democrats labeled "Bottled Watergate."

During the commotion, Pawlenty attacked Obama's ability to create jobs, reduce the deficit and boost the economy. He also used his six-minute speech to rib the president's Affordable Care Act.

"We should all bet on America," Pawlenty said, playing on the theme of the president's bus tour through Ohio. "But we shouldn't double-down on Bar-

ack Obama. We shouldn't double-down on this president because his presidency has been a losing game."

Jindal piggy-backed on Pawlenty's message.

"Do you remember, at the beginning of this administration, [Obama] said, 'If we don't turn around the economy in three more years, I'll be a one-time president?'" Jindal asked. "Let's hold him to that promise."

The rally concluded with Jindal calling Obama "the most liberal and incompetent president since Jimmy Carter."

After the rally, State Rep. Nick Celebrezze of Parma and North Shore Federation of Labor Exec-

utive Secretary Harriet Applegate — both Democrats — rebutted the GOP messages from across the street.

"President Obama bet on the American worker, American manufacturing and ingenuity, and now American auto manufacturing is back on top of the world," Celebrezze said.

Jindal and Pawlenty made a campaign stop in Maumee earlier in the day. The bus headed to the Mahoning Valley after the 30-minute visit in Parma.

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JOHN KUNTZ | THE PLAIN DEALER

President Barack Obama and Damarion Pruchinsky, 7, of Lorain pose Thursday for a photo by the boy's father, Donald, at Ziggy's Pub and Restaurant in Amherst. Obama stopped at the pub en route to a Parma rally.

OBAMA

FROM A1

Campaign bus winds way across Ohio

Obama's speech in Parma capped the first day of a two-day push through battleground Ohio and Pennsylvania.

He'll complete what he has dubbed the Betting on America Tour today with campaign stops in the Youngstown area and in Pittsburgh. He carried both states in 2008, and both are expected to be competitive this November.

In Parma, and earlier at an ice cream social in Sandusky, Obama repeated from his campaign speech about the economy three weeks ago at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland. Obama said a vote for Romney and other Republicans is a vote to return to the policies of former President George W. Bush.

"Mr. Romney and his allies in Congress, they've got a particular view," Obama said in Parma. "They believe if we cut taxes, especially for the wealthiest Americans [at the expense of education, Medicare and other programs] that somehow all this is going to benefit you."

"I've got a different theory," Obama continued. "I think they're wrong."

And hence the Betting on

America theme: He presented himself as a president who has invested in working Americans, citing his support of the federal loans to Chrysler and General Motors.

The U.S. auto industry's subsequent rebound has been key across northern Ohio's car manufacturing belt between Toledo and Youngstown.

Obama also celebrated last week's U.S. Supreme Court decision to uphold his Affordable Care Act, the 2010 health care law that Republicans are campaigning against with gusto.

"We fought so hard to make that happen," he said of the law during his speech at Washington Park in Sandusky. "We don't need to reargue the last two years."

For the first time while in Parma, Obama met Natoma Canfield, the Medina woman who became the face of his push to pass the health care law.

Canfield, a breast-cancer survivor, wrote to Obama on Dec. 29, 2009, describing how she went into debt trying to pay health insurance premiums.

The president invited her to join him at a rally in Strongsville a few months later but she was unable to make it.

She had been diagnosed with leukemia. Obama cited her again last week, after the court's ruling.

"It was amazing to get to meet him," Canfield told reporters after the Parma speech. "A very

proud moment."

In Parma, the crowd began gathering at James Day Park as early as 8:30 a.m.

"I am here because I think this president has brought back dignity and honor to the office," said Jean McCormick, 67, of Shaker Heights.

"I'm very proud that he took his stand on health care with everyone against him."

Samantha Martin, 22, a recent college graduate from Garrettsville, came with her mother, Judi Gyulai. Martin helped with Obama's 2008 campaign.

"One of the reasons why I'm here is to hear what he has to say about education," Martin said.

"Everybody's been saying we need more jobs but we also need an education."

Obama started his bus tour in Maumee, near Toledo.

There, while speaking at the Wolcott House Museum, he briefly alluded to his administration's announcement Thursday that it would go before the World Trade Organization to challenge tariffs that China has imposed on more than \$3 billion in U.S. auto exports.

It is the latest in a series of trade disputes with China over products including steel, chickens, tires and rare earth metals.

China last year imposed duties ranging from 2 to 21.5 percent on U.S. cars and SUVs with an engine capacity of 2.5 liters or larger.

China contended the U.S. government's bailout of several auto makers unfairly subsidized the U.S. auto industry.

Jeeps made in Toledo and Acuras made in Marysville are among the vehicles affected by China's tariffs.

The duties disproportionately fall on Chrysler and GM products.

Between Maumee and Sandusky, Obama visited Kozy Corners in Oak Harbor, where he greeted customers and ate a cheeseburger.

He also stopped at Bergman Orchards in Danbury Township, west of Sandusky, to buy a dozen ears of corn, peaches and cherries.

After Sandusky, on the way to Parma, his bus made an unannounced detour into Amherst, where the president and Strickland stopped at Ziggy's, a popular restaurant.

Obama ordered two draft pints of Miller Lite, one each for him and the former governor.

A few moments later someone handed him a bottle of Bud Light, which he nursed while posing for pictures with families and striking up casual conversations with other patrons.

Plain Dealer reporter Sabrina Eaton and White House pool reports contributed to this story.

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Romney, under fire, is bolstering his team

PHILIP RUCKER
Washington Post

WOLFEBORO, N.H. — Mitt Romney is planning to fortify his communications and messaging team by adding seasoned operatives, advisers close to the campaign said Thursday, after withering criticism from prominent conservative voices that his insular team has fumbled recent opportunities.

Romney's advisers insisted that he would keep his inner circle intact amid growing concerns about the Republican presidential nominee and his campaign. The tempest began with a weekend tweet from media tycoon Rupert Murdoch and burst Thursday onto the pages of his Wall Street Journal newspaper, as its conservative editorial board opined that Romney's advisers were "slowly squandering an historic opportunity" to beat President Barack Obama.

By day's end, talk radio host Laura Ingraham had asked listeners whether the vacationing candidate should "get off the jet ski," and influential commentator William Kristol, who recently returned from a private retreat with Romney and his senior strategists, had bemoaned the campaign's "dangerous self-delusion."

Without a course correction, Kristol posited, Romney would suffer the same fate as the last two presidential nominees from Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis and John Kerry, both Democrats.

Romney's advisers strongly rejected the course-correction suggestion but said they have been in the process of recruiting more political muscle to his Boston-based headquarters.

The campaign plans to bolster its rapid-response and overall messaging operations and to assemble a senior staff for the eventual vice presidential running mate, according to strategists close to the campaign.

There are no plans, however, to alter Romney's core team of advisers, most of whom have worked for the former Massachusetts governor for years, and campaign officials said it was highly unlikely that Romney would demote or fire any of his senior staffers.

NATION AND WORLD

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SANFORD, FLA.

Zimmerman's bond is set at \$1 million

George Zimmerman's bond was set at \$1 million, and he was ordered to stay in Seminole County, Fla., until his trial in the slaying of Trayvon Martin. Judge Kenneth Lester said Zimmerman flouted the system and appeared ready to flee with the "found money" raised online.

BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

Dictator sentenced for stealing children

Former dictator Jorge Videla was sentenced Thursday to 50 years in prison over the Argentine military regime's systematic theft of children from their families. Videla, 86, who ruled from 1976 until 1981, is already imprisoned for life for other crimes.

WOLFEBORO, N.H.

Romney's wife says veep may be female

Mitt Romney's wife has disclosed a tantalizing detail about her husband's vice presidential search: He's considering choosing a woman. "We've been looking at that, and I love that option as well," Ann Romney told CBS News in a joint interview.

BAGHDAD, IRAQ

Iraq: al-Qaida agents slipping into Syria

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari said Thursday that al-Qaida militants were crossing from Iraq to Syria to carry out attacks, and he warned of a violent spillover that could shake the Middle East. "Now their direction is the other way around," Zebari said.

MOSCOW

Berlin urges Russia to give Assad asylum

German officials suggested Russia offer asylum to Syrian leader Bashar Assad to help stop the violence in that country, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on state television Thursday. Lavrov said Russia decided asylum wouldn't be a good idea.

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Extreme-sport writer dies during climb

Michael J. Ybarra, 45, a freelance writer who was an extreme-sports correspondent for the Wall Street Journal and who contributed articles to the Los Angeles Times, died in a mountain climbing fall in Yosemite National Park over the weekend.

HARGILL, TEXAS

Border agent shot; father, son charged

Pedro Alvarado, 41, and his son, Arnoldo, 18, have been charged in federal court in the shooting earlier this week of a U.S. border patrol agent. Arnoldo Alvarado told investigators that he and his father drove to Agent Kelton Harrison's car with lights off and that he fired twice at the car.

LONDON

Britain pares down size of its army

Defense Secretary Philip Hammond said the U.K. will cut its army to 82,000 soldiers by 2020 from 102,000, around half its size at the height of the Cold War in 1978. Part-time reservists will be doubled to 30,000.

SAN JOSE, CALIF.

Acquittal returned in beating of priest

A jury Thursday acquitted Will Lynch of felony charges that he beat up the cleric he says brutally raped him decades ago. The prosecution contended that in 2010, Lynch, then 42, beat up the Rev. Jerold Lindner, who was 65, at a retirement center.

TIMBUKTU, MALI

Sanctions threatened for Islamist fighters

The U.N. Security Council threatened sanctions against Islamist fighters and condemned the destruction of tombs in Timbuktu but did not authorize an intervention force Thursday.

— From wire reports