

Mitt Romney Tells Conservatives He's Sorry He's Not President

At a gathering for conservatives to plot their future, there was a stark reminder of the past on Friday as failed presidential candidate **Mitt Romney** made his first public speech since election night.

"I am sorry that I won't be your president," Romney told the audience of the Conservative Political Action Conference, "but I will be your co-worker and I will stand shoulder to shoulder beside you."

Since he accepted defeat to President Barack Obama in the early hours of the morning on Nov. 7 in Boston, Romney has largely vanished from view. He is occasionally spotted on the ski slopes with his family, pumping gas, or shopping at Costco.

He and his wife Ann have retired to La Jolla, Calif., where the Romney family keeps a home, although they did give an interview to Fox News last month.

The former Massachusetts governor was the first losing presidential candidate in nearly 25 years not to be in Washington on Inauguration Day.

Looking tanned since his time off the campaign trail, Romney delivered what sounded very like his campaign speech. He told vignettes about the Americans he met as he traveled across the country on the way to his eventual defeat.

Romney said he realized the awkwardness of his position.

"As someone who just lost the last election, I'm probably not the best person to chart the course for the next election," he

said.

Rocky Relationship

Romney has never had a simple relationship with the conservative base, which always suspected he was too moderate on healthcare, abortion and other issues.

In past years, Romney won the conference's straw poll for preferred presidential candidate, but audiences like CPAC are often filled with the sort of Republicans who were most suspicious of his conservative credentials.

Appearing at the same event last year, Romney declared himself to be "severely conservative." That strained formulation did not warm conservatives' hearts and led to ridicule from some in the media.

For many gathered at a hotel here south of Washington, the lesson from Romney's loss is a simple one: Republicans nominated a candidate who wasn't conservative enough.

On Thursday, Texas Governor Rick Perry, once Romney's rival in the presidential primary, told the crowd: "The popular media narrative is that this country has shifted away from conservative ideas, as evidenced by the last two presidential elections. That's what they think, that's what they say. That might be true if Republicans had actually nominated conservative candidates in 2008 and 2012."

"The fact is the base didn't come out for him," said Bob Vander Plaats, the president of the Family Leader and a prominent social conservative in the early-voting state of Iowa. "No matter how much we did to push our base towards him that was a hard rope to push."

Romney was received warmly by the audience and the former candidate thanked them for their "earnest support."

He did have one warning for conservatives.

"We particularly need to hear from the governors of the blue and purple states," he said, advising conservatives not to give up on the states where he lost to Obama.

Romney mentioned two governors—New Jersey's Chris Christie and Virginia's Bob McDonnell – who were not invited to participate in the influential conference.

Both governors have been criticized for taking positions that part with Republican orthodoxy. But a Reuters/Ipsos online poll on Friday showed Christie as the Republican with the best rating against possible 2016 Democratic opponents Hillary Clinton and Vice President Joe Biden.

Largely Ignored

Since his defeat, Romney has rarely been mentioned by conservatives.

Speaking a few hours before Romney, Wisconsin Representative Paul Ryan, the Republican vice presidential nominee, centered his remarks on the federal budget and made no mention of his former running mate.

In the aftermath of the last campaign, Republicans have set about refashioning their image, moving away from Romney's campaign positions.

Romney's campaign was marked by a hawkish view on immigration and was hindered by his remarks in secretly recorded video deploring nearly half of all Americans as "victims."

Now, Republican congressmen are playing leading roles in trying to reform immigration laws and leaders are encouraging reaching out to African-American and Hispanic voters, two groups that backed Obama by wide margins.

Influential Republicans like Texas Senator Ted Cruz and Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal have called on their party to embrace the people Romney appeared to reject in his infamous

“47 percent” remarks about voters who receive government aid.

Despite his downfall, Romney was undeterred.

“It’s fashionable in some circles to be pessimistic about America, about conservative solutions, about the Republican Party,” Romney said. “I utterly reject that pessimism.”

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