

Santorum Begins Tennessee Tour at Spirit-Filled Church

Republican presidential hopeful Rick Santorum appeared before an enthusiastic crowd of supporters this afternoon at a Spirit-filled Southern Baptist church in Chattanooga, Tenn.—his first stop in the state before the Super Tuesday primaries on March 6.

Abba's House, formerly Central Baptist Church of Hixon, is led by charismatic author Ron Phillips and opened its doors to the Chattanooga Tea Party, which coordinated the event to parade local and regional candidates in a "Liberty Forum," highlighted by Santorum's appearance.

Santorum played to a vast majority of the crowd when he extolled the virtues of family life in the United States, stating that our nation was built from the bottom up, starting with the family and the church: "When people are hurting they don't want to go to the federal government; they're going to rely on the family.

"Family is the foundation of our country, and I know where you stand in Tennessee," he added. "We don't need the government to 'fix things' for us!"

Speaking during the second hour of the three-hour event at the expansive sanctuary of Abba's House, the candidate appeared in blue jeans and an open-collar shirt to deliver a speech centered on the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

"You can't have one without the other; it's like peanut butter with no jelly," Santorum quipped of the two documents. "The Declaration is the heart and soul of America ... it grants us rights, which come from God. And with those rights comes responsibility.

“One of those rights is a right to life,” the former Pennsylvania senator admonished. “It’s one thing to be pro-life ... it’s another thing to go out and fight for life, giving life dignity, value and worth.”

Referring back to the Declaration, Santorum continued his remarks by breaking down the well-known passage of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—specifically focusing on the latter. He received one of several standing ovations when he equated true happiness as “doing God’s will in our lives” and doing something good and noble.

Santorum received another standing ovation when he referred to First Things First, a Chattanooga-based not-for-profit dedicated to strengthening families through education, collaboration and mobilization.

Santorum’s appearance in Chattanooga comes three days ahead of Republican rival Newt Gingrich, who will speak at a \$1,000-a-plate fundraiser at the famous Chattanooga Choo Choo hotel on Tuesday. Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney has yet to announce plans for a stop in the southeast Tennessee city.

Santorum is enjoying a surge, equaling and even passing his closest rival, Romney, in the polls. On Saturday, Santorum’s visit was met by around 50 protesters toting signs and chanting about gay rights outside the megachurch.

According to the latest Rasmussen Report on presidential tracking, President Obama leads Romney 46 percent to 43 percent. If Santorum is the Republican nominee, the president leads 47 percent to 42 percent. In Santorum’s home state of Pennsylvania, the president has a six-point edge over Santorum, while Romney is a mere percentage point behind.