

## Barack 'N' Roll

### Obama's surge forces rivals to play catch-up

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Photo by Angela Rowlings

NASHUA, N.H. - Illinois Sen. Barack Obama's meteoric rise in Iowa has shaken the New Hampshire landscape, as candidates in both parties, including ex-Bay State Gov. **Mitt Romney**, scramble to echo his message and cast themselves as agents of "change."

**"Everyone is stealing that page from the (Obama) playbook," said Georgetown University political professor Christopher C. Hull. "Actually, Hillary Clinton was the first to steal this page from Barack Obama. She tried it three weeks before the Iowa caucus, but nobody believed her. Romney is no different."**

Obama - who has been described as a blend of John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. - has drawn rock-star-like crowds in New Hampshire. At the Pinkerton Academy in Derry yesterday, more than 2,000 supporters packed the gym and waited more than 1 1/2 hours for Obama to arrive. A day earlier, Romney drew a crowd of 300.

Following Obama's win, Romney refocused his message on one central theme: change, a word that Romney used no fewer than a dozen times at a Nashua voter forum yesterday.

"Unbelievable and totally shameless" is how GOP consultant Margaret Hoover, a former deputy to Karl Rove in the Bush administration, described Romney's tactic. "It's totally transparent," she said.

Romney unveiled his retooled pitch at a voter forum in Derry on Saturday. Complete with new props that included a banner emblazoned with the slogan "Washington is broken" and a to-do list, he portrayed himself as the business world's ultimate change agent.

"Barack Obama got out there and Hillary Clinton said, 'I've got all this experience, I've been there all those years.' And yet, he trounced her," Romney said.

Yesterday, Romney argued that he is uniquely positioned to beat Obama, something he said his archrival in the Granite State, Arizona Sen. John McCain, can't do.

"Are we going to do the same thing and put another long-serving U.S. senator up against him for him to talk about?" Romney said in Nashua. "Or are we going to put somebody up - I hope it's me - somebody who has spent his lifetime not just in politics, not in Washington, but changing things . . . changing businesses for the better, changing the state for the better."

Romney spokesman Eric Fehrstrom insisted the candidate has always stood for change in Washington, citing eight speeches or interviews since February.

"Ridiculous," Fehrstrom said of observations that Romney's trying to steal Obama's message. "Whoever says that hasn't been paying attention."

McCain, meanwhile, has also tried to play the Obama card, with spokeswoman Jill Hazelbaker on Friday saying, "John McCain's record as a reformer - and as an agent for change in Washington - stands second to none."

And Hoover pointed out that even the winner of the Iowa caucuses, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, "has started to sound like Barack Obama too."

“His rhetoric about hope and change is just like Obama,” she said.

Obama’s campaign has noticed the flattering trend, as well.

“Winning in Iowa has focused a very bright spotlight on just how many Americans are looking to change the way things are being done,” Obama press secretary Bill Burton said yesterday. “It’s good that Sen. Obama’s message is catching on. It’s going to make it easier for us to achieve it when we’re in the White House.

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