

Rocked, Romney hangs on

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Photo by AP

Facing the biggest one-day rush of primaries in history, former Gov. **Mitt Romney** yesterday vowed to keep battling no matter what as his campaign framed GOP rival John McCain's Bay State visit as nothing more than a nasty personal affront.

But polls projected a cloudy picture for Romney as McCain, the Arizona senator, is expected to pick up the bulk of big-state wins today.

"Romney can just pack his bags," said Georgetown University political science professor **Christopher C. Hull**, citing the Republican Party's tradition of rallying around the presumptive front-runner.

For his part, Romney told reporters aboard his campaign plane yesterday, "I don't think it's going to be over Tuesday night. I wish it were over in my favor, I hope it's not over against me."

The ex-Bay State governor declared himself the true heir to "the house that Reagan built" and said he won't quit the race no matter how he fares today, the Associated Press reported.

However, Romney has reportedly scheduled a campaign staff and budget review for tomorrow, signaling his intention to scale back his formidable ground network.

Romney supporters carried the campaign's message yesterday with former Lt. Gov. **Kerry Healey** going so far as to blame the **Patriots [team stats]**' loss on McCain's presence and former Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) raising issues about McCain's notorious temper.

Yet hours before the pivotal contest, the race for GOP nominee appeared headed back to the future with McCain as the front-runner once again despite lingering questions within the Republican right-wing about his conservative credentials.

Conservative talk show hosts in the anyone-but-McCain camp - Laura Ingraham, Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity - all tout Romney as the last hope for the so-called Reagan agenda. But their support may be too late.

Polls show Romney on track to win by a landslide in Utah, and by a comfortable margin in Colorado and Massachusetts. However, he has ceded delegate-rich Illinois, New York and New Jersey to McCain. Romney also has a chance to top the ticket in Georgia and Tennessee, where he made campaign stops yesterday.

Romney's hopes of remaining afloat could hinge on a good showing in California, where some polls have him tied with McCain. While refusing to predict a win in any particular state, McCain did say he's hoping to seal the deal today.

"I am optimistic about tomorrow. I hope we can do well enough to hopefully bring this process to a close," McCain said at a **Faneuil Hall** rally, joined by two of Romney's predecessors, former Gov. Paul Cellucci and former acting Gov. Jane Swift.

If McCain does outmaneuver Romney, he has former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee to thank at least partially, said Larry Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics.

"(Romney) would be winning in the South if Huckabee wasn't there," Sabato said.

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