

GOP candidates rally faithful in Nevada

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

RENO – From a cheering crowd of several hundred at a brief but energetic Mitt Romney rally to a more subdued event for Rick Santorum hosted by the Republican Jewish Coalition to another well-attended rally for Ron Paul, it was a trifecta of presidential candidates in Reno ahead of the Saturday GOP caucus.

Romney got the balling rolling at the Grove, with an estimated 800 supporters packed inside and standing outside the event center in south Reno. Romney spoke briefly to those standing outside before giving a short but enthusiastic speech to those crowded inside.

Santorum spoke to about 250 people attending an event at the Atlantis hosted by the Republican Jewish Coalition. He focused much of his time on the threat from Iran both to Israel and the world.

Paul's rally at the Grand Sierra Resort attracted more than 1,000 enthusiastic supporters. Paul touched on a number of concerns, including his desire to see the repeal of the Patriot Act, saying American civil liberties have been eroded since 9-11.

All three candidates are vying for support in the first in the West caucus, a binding vote that will ultimately produce delegates to the Republican National Convention. The fourth contender, Newt Gingrich, spoke in Reno on Wednesday.

Hearing all three candidates speak displayed distinct differences on such issues as foreign policy. Romney called for a stronger military, one so strong that it would

neutralize the country's enemies. Santorum focused on the need to deal with Iran and its development of nuclear weapons. Paul said the U.S. foreign policy of intervention around the world has been a failure.

Romney focuses on Obama

Romney spent the first few minutes of his 18-minute speech criticizing President Obama's failure to restore the economy, acting like the front-runner he is in Nevada's First in the West caucus. He did not mention any of the other GOP contenders in his remarks.

The rest of the speech was more to rally the troops to turn out at the caucus to lock in a victory and ensure continued momentum in his quest to win the Republican nomination.

Romney, expected to win the Nevada caucus based on poll results, went on the attack on Obama for the high unemployment rate, reduced median income and high rate of foreclosures.

"And the people in this country are really suffering, in part because of the extraordinary failures of this president," he said. "This presidency has not worked. And these are not just numbers and statistics. These are real people."

Romney also focused on his leadership abilities, saying Obama has not been a leader.

"And this president we elected to lead, he chose to follow, and now it is time for him to get out of the way," he said.

Romney cited his successful business experience, his work in bringing the Olympics to Salt Lake City, and his successes as governor of Massachusetts even while having to deal with a majority of Democrats.

"This election is not just about replacing a president," he said. "This is also an election about setting a course for America. Because this president and the people with him have a

very different view about where America should go than I have, and I believe that you have.

“First of all, he would take us towards a greater and greater level of debt,” Romney said. “He is willing to spend a trillion dollars more a year than we take in, every year.”

Obama is taking the country down the same path to economic disaster as Greece, Italy and Spain, he said.

Romney said he will cut the federal budget’s share of the economy from 25 percent to 20 percent and restore fiscal sanity.

He also criticized Obama for his energy policy’s reliance on alternative energy, and his foreign policy, calling his actions regarding Afghanistan naive.

Santorum talks about the threat from Iran

Santorum earned a lot of applause for his comments regarding the relationship between the U.S. and Israel. He too focused on the need to defeat Obama, citing the president’s reluctance to impose sanctions against Iran for its development of a nuclear weapon.

“This is the quintessential threat not just to Israel, but is the quintessential threat to the world,” he said. “We need a president who will step forward and define the enemy as to who they are.”

Obama’s approach has been one of appeasement, Santorum said.

“We need to stand firm, define the enemy, and do what we did with the Soviet Union,” he said. “Stand up and define evil as the evil they are.”

Paul talks about civil liberties and personal responsibility

Paul took his message of less government and more personal

responsibility to an enthusiastic crowd of supporters.

He said of Nevada: "This is a great state because guess what, there are a lot of people here who really like freedom.

"In the last hundred years I would say we've gone in the wrong directions, we've gradually have had our freedoms eroded," Paul said. "We've adopted a foreign policy, really, more recently in the last several decades, of a policy that has given us nothing but grief.

"And that is a policy of military intervention in other countries for not very many good reasons at all," he said. "And I think we need to change our foreign policy and bring our troops home."

Paul said the country would be stronger with less intervention around the world.

"This idea that the more money you spend in militarism the safer we'll be is a failed policy; it is a myth," he said.

Paul also said Congress should abolish the Transportation Safety Administration, created after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The effect of this intense round of Nevada appearances by the four remaining GOP candidates should become clear late Saturday.