



## URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE

### Romney praised in Utah for avoiding specifics of Mormonism

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#### [Mitt Romney Opens Up About LDS Faith](#)

Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney discussed few specifics of what he believes as a Mormon during a speech on faith in America on Thursday - and that's exactly what political observers in the church's home state said he should have done.

"I had no expectations that he would get into the theological weeds of Mormonism. There simply isn't the time to address all of the issues that some people may have with the Mormon faith," said Kirk Jowers, a Romney supporter and director of the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah.

Romney's speech sought to allay fears about his faith among voters less than a month before the first Republican nomination contests. Many evangelical Christians consider The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to be a cult.



(AP)

Rather than address that charge, Romney focused on religious tolerance and the values he shares with other faiths.

"There are some who would have a presidential candidate describe and explain his church's distinctive doctrines. To do so would enable the very religious test the founders prohibited in the Constitution. No candidate should become the spokesman for his faith," Romney said during his speech in College Station, Texas.

Romney's speech was closely watched in Utah, where the church has its headquarters and most of the state's residents are Mormon. More than 100 students, faculty and staff watched the early morning speech with Jowers.

"I think there was a great deal of confidence in Romney giving a speech that would not embarrass the church," Jowers said. "Most (students) said they were moved by it."

Wayne Holland, chairman of the Utah Democratic Party, said it was unfortunate Romney had to discuss his religion in the first place.

"I do believe there will be a Mormon president of the United States at some point, and I think that because of the openness and non-litmus test of the Democratic Party that it will be a Democrat," he said.

How much, if any, doctrinal specifics Romney would talk about had been the subject of wide speculation on local blogs, newspaper and television Web sites all week. Romney ultimately decided against explaining how his beliefs diverge from other religions.

When it comes to the important evangelical voting bloc, those differences in beliefs can be vast.

Many non-Mormons dispute claims that the faith's central text, the Book of Mormon, is a valid account of Jesus' dealings with ancient Americans. Mormons believe the book was translated through revelation by founder Joseph Smith from a set of buried golden plates.

Evangelicals also don't accept Mormon belief in a Heavenly Mother - God's female partner; a pre-existence in heaven before birth; or a hereafter that includes a three-level heavenly kingdom. They also find odd the practices of wearing religious undergarments that some say possess protective powers; the barring of non-Mormons from entering their temples; the practice of posthumous baptism; and a belief that man can progress to be God's peer in Heaven.

Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson, a Democrat and inactive Mormon, said Romney was pandering to religious voters

whose theology bears little resemblance to his. Anderson disputed Romney's assertion that if elected he would not take direction from the church president, whom Mormons consider a prophet.

``Not if he doesn't want to put his eternal salvation and becoming the god of his own universe at risk," Anderson said. ``Members of the LDS church know that it's their duty to obey church leaders."

The church is officially politically neutral, but it sometimes takes stands on moral issues, including alcohol, gay marriage and gambling. It has also weighed in on tax policy.

In the 1970s the church also opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, which would have guaranteed equal rights to Americans regardless of gender. The church excommunicated a member who testified in favor of the amendment before Congress in 1978.

Kelly Patterson, a political science professor at church-owned Brigham Young University, said concerns over a candidate's religion will never go away but can be minimized.

``I don't think you ever put this kind of issue completely to rest, but you can help to shape the way people think about it and discuss it. I think he took a large step toward accomplishing that," Patterson said.

Some Utah politicians who are Mormon said Romney chose the right tone in his speech.

``Among those many Americans who are unfamiliar with the Mormon faith, there is great curiosity," said Republican U.S. Rep. Chris Cannon in a statement. ``If the speech encourages those with questions to more thoroughly investigate Mormonism, then that is a good thing."

Quin Monson, also a political science professor at BYU, said describing Mormon theology is a ``mine field" for candidates. But if Romney wins the nomination he could end the need for future Mormon candidates to give similar speeches.

``The longer Mitt Romney sticks around in the public eye, the better off the next Mormon will be," he said.

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