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Gingrich Bets on Attack Mode Against News Media

By JEREMY W. PETERS

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GREENVILLE, S.C. — They were Newt Gingrich's other adversaries in the South Carolina primary and they helped define his surge to victory as much as Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum and Ron Paul did.



John Moore/Getty Images

Newt Gingrich with his wife, Callista, second from right, on the stage of CNN's debate on Thursday in North Charleston, S.C.

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The Republican Presidential Field

Republican Debate

When: Monday at 9 p.m. Eastern time

Where: University of South Florida, in Tampa

Participants: Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum

John King of CNN, Juan Williams of Fox News and Brian Ross of ABC News all ended up being hit by Mr. Gingrich in his relentless criticism of the news media last week, part of an anti-elite, anti-establishment campaign that is rallying conservative voters around him.

With momentum on his side, Mr. Gingrich kept up the attacks on Sunday, accusing David Gregory, the moderator of NBC News's "Meet the Press," of distorting his record. When Mr. Gregory pointed out that some critics had referred to the former speaker's consulting work as lobbying, he snapped at him.

"David, you know better than that. I was not a lobbyist," he said. "I was never a lobbyist. I never did any lobbying. Don't try to mess these things up."

Mr. Gingrich also pointed out that bashing the news media, as he did in two debates last week, was endearing him to voters.

"The highest, the most intense passion in both debates was a head-on collision about what the news media was doing," he said.

Displaying such aggressiveness could help him with Republican voters who want a nominee they believe will bring a fight to President Obama, as he suggested to Candy Crowley of CNN later in the day. "One of the reasons I think people in South Carolina voted for me was a belief that I would bring a fight to President Obama."

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media again before a national audience this week in Florida, first on Monday when he appears before Brian Williams of NBC in a debate in Tampa, and then again on Thursday at a CNN debate in Jacksonville.

Network executives are bracing themselves now that Mr. Gingrich has found what he believes to be a winning strategy.

“You’d better be ready to tangle,” said Michael Clemente, Fox News’s senior vice president for news. “That’s not the role of the moderator. But if you’re not ready to push back, you’re going to be the dog bone.”

Mr. Gingrich’s skewering of the media fits well with the anti-establishment pitch he makes to voters: only someone with his tenacity can deliver the jolt of change that Washington needs.

Every time he has gone after the news media in recent days, he has been rewarded with roaring approval from conservatives. First it was when he dismissed flat out Juan

Williams’s contention [during a debate in Myrtle Beach, S.C., last Monday](#) that the former speaker’s comments about blacks and food stamps were “at a minimum insulting.” One woman congratulated him at a campaign stop in South Carolina for “for putting Mr. Juan Williams in his place.”

Then came CNN’s debate on Thursday, when some in the audience rose in a standing ovation after Mr. Gingrich scolded Mr. King for asking about an ABC News interview Mr. Ross conducted with Mr. Gingrich’s second wife, Marianne Gingrich, in which she said he had asked for an open marriage. Mr. Gingrich called the story false and, for good measure, lashed out at Mr. King, the moderator: “I am astounded that CNN would take trash like that and use it to open a [presidential debate](#) .”

Conservative talk radio and the blogosphere have cheered him on.

Joshua Treviño, one of the founders of RedState, a leading conservative news site, wrote over the weekend that he thinks Mr. Gingrich is channeling the suspicions that many conservatives have of the news media.

“Conservatives (accurately) perceive the media mainstream to be a de facto organ of the liberal left, and by extension, the Democratic Party,” a post on the blog [Ricochet](#) quoted Mr. Treviño as saying in an e-mail. “And they understand that conservative governance is absolutely impossible unless that organ is defeated or co-opted.”

One unanswered question for Mr. Gingrich is whether this strategy will suit him as well in Florida, where the next primary is on Jan. 31. In South Carolina, he benefited from a confluence of factors. It was not just his railing against the establishment that helped push him to a 12-point victory, but a series of stumbles by Mr. Romney. Mr. Gingrich was also able to keep pace with the heavy flow of negative advertising directed at him, thanks to millions of dollars in spending by a “super PAC” supporting him.

Unlike in Iowa, where negative advertising was overwhelmingly directed at him while he lacked the resources to fight back, the picture was more balanced in South Carolina. According to Kantar Media’s Campaign Media Analysis group, between Jan. 6 and Jan. 19, two days before the primary, spending on negative ads directed at Mr. Gingrich totaled \$1.5 million. The amount spent on ads attacking Mr. Romney, meanwhile, was \$1

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Romney and his super PAC have already spent nearly \$7 million on advertising there.

“Is the environment in Florida going to be heavy and one-sided like Iowa, or incredibly heavy and pretty balanced like South Carolina?” asked Kenneth M. Goldstein, president of the Kantar political analysis group. “Advertising can have a lot of impact when it’s just one side competing heavily.”

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