


Nation

Between the Lines

By Mark Halperin

 Even as **Mitt Romney** has effectively locked up the Republican presidential nomination with primary wins in Wisconsin, Maryland and Washington, D.C.,

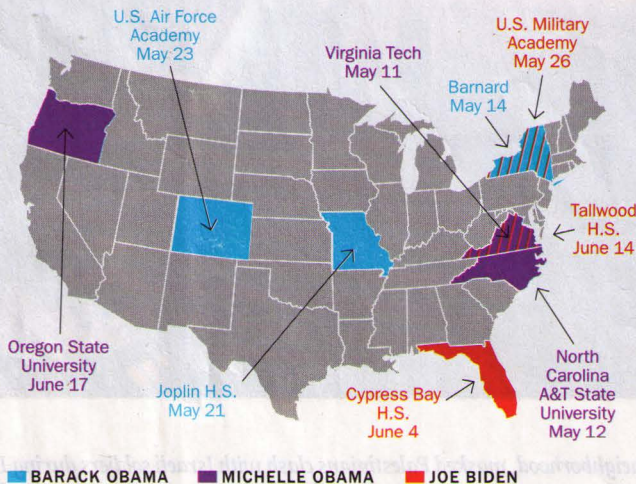
President Obama's advisers are more confident than ever that they will beat the former Massachusetts governor in the general election ... Giving Obama's team a buoyant feeling: Romney's unending string of gaffes that reinforce his image as someone who is hopelessly out of touch with the real lives of real people ... Obama proved himself eager to join his aides in some frivolous but purposeful needling of his likely opponent when, during a high-profile speech to the nation's newspaper editors, he mocked Romney's quaint use of the word *marvelous* to paint the New Englander as highfalutin and fussy ... Romney's prospects rely on two tracks: abandoning the effort to be likable and settling instead for awkwardly endearing (though his public image is a long way off from that) and using a series of upcoming framing speeches to condemn the Obama economic record ...

Romney's top strategist, **Stuart Stevens**,  explained to the *New York Times*, "This [election] isn't going to be about dogs or children's toys or birth control pills. It's going to be about the overall direction of the country" ... Republicans believe independent voters will ultimately decide that Obama is too liberal and must be replaced ... Romney's aides also want to advance the idea that Obama fails to take responsibility for the bad stuff that has happened on his watch ... While Obama was busy linking Romney to the House budget written by Wisconsin Congressman **Paul Ryan**, the two Republicans were chummily campaigning together in late March, prompting observers to speculate about a Romney-Ryan ticket in the offing.

GRADUATION SPEAKERS

Get 'Em While They're Young

You'd expect to see the President giving a commencement address at West Point or the U.S. Air Force Academy; he speaks at one of the three service academies each year. But Barnard College? It's clear Obama chose the all-women school to curry favor with female voters. Meanwhile, Vice President Joe Biden and First Lady Michelle Obama are speaking in swing states like Florida and Virginia to strike a chord with young voters—and their parents.



NUMBER

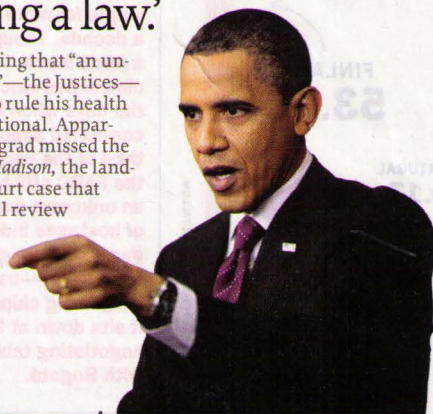
3,168

Number of criminal aliens and fugitives arrested during a six-day sweep of all 50 states, Puerto Rico and Washington by Immigration and Customs Enforcement

LAW SCHOOLED

'I'm confident the Supreme Court will not take ... an unprecedented, extraordinary step of overturning a law.'

BARACK OBAMA, lamenting that "an unelected group of people"—the Justices—could have the power to rule his health care reform unconstitutional. Apparently, the Harvard Law grad missed the lecture on *Marbury v. Madison*, the landmark 1803 Supreme Court case that helped establish judicial review



THE MITT ROMNEY ENDORSE-O-METER

TEPID

"We have to come together behind ... Mitt Romney."

SENATOR MARCO RUBIO



"Everyone knows the nominee is going to be Romney. That's not so bad."

ANN COULTER



"[He has] the ability to get things done."

TIM PAWLENTY



"I don't need a rock-star President."

MEGHAN MCCAIN



"I think we're entering a phase where it could become counterproductive if this drags on much longer."

REP. PAUL RYAN



"Mitt is not a perfect candidate. It's hard for blue collar families ... to identify with him."

GEORGE PATAKI



FREEZING

ROMNEY: JUSTIN SULLIVAN—GETTY IMAGES; STEVENS: BRIAN SWENEN—REUTERS; OBAMA: CHIP SOMODEVILLA—GETTY IMAGES; COULTER: PETER KRAMER—AP; RUBIO: CHRIS MADALONI—CO; ROLL CALL/GETTY IMAGES; PAWLENTY: SPENCER PLATT—GETTY IMAGES; MCCAIN: LUCAS JACKSON—REUTERS; RYAN AND PATAKI: WILLIAM B. PLOWMAN—NO AMERICAN DEBT/AP