Romney charges Obama's ad attacks 'misdirected'

The Associated Press

Republican Mitt Romney demanded Monday that President Barack Obama back away from his persistent attacks on Romney's record at Bain Capital, advising that it would be better "if you spent some time speaking about your record."

"What does it say about a president whose record is so poor that all he can do in this campaign is attack me," Romney said in a nationally broadcast interview.

In a separate interview, Obama said his campaign has aired "a whole slew" of positive campaign ads but said the media largely has ignored them.

In his interview on Fox News' "Fox & Friends," Romney was asked whether Obama should apologize for statements and campaign ads suggesting that Romney has not been truthful in his accounts of his record as head of Bain Capital, a private equity firm.

Romney responded: "I think when people accuse you of a crime you have every reason to go after them pretty hard and I'm going to continue going after him." He defended his business record but did not demand that Obama apologize. Romney also declined to make a fuller disclosure of tax returns than he has already committed himself to releasing.

The latest exchanges came Monday as Obama prepared for campaign appearances in Ohio, a critical state for both candidates, and Romney was to join Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal on a fundraising trip.

Obama's campaign has been arguing that Romney's record at Bain Capital indicates that jobs were shipped overseas under his watch. That pitch has been given a lot of attention at a time when the nation's unemployment rate remains above 8 percent and millions of people are out of work.

Asked about this, Romney said he was "very proud of the record I had in my business career." He added: "I'd say to the president, wouldn't it be interesting Mr. President, wouldn't it be interesting if you spent some time speaking about your record."

Romney also pressed a new line of attack against Obama, saying the Democratic president had put the interests of his wealthy campaign donors above the middle class.

"When billions upon billions of dollars are given by the Obama administration to the businesses of campaign contributors, that's a real problem, particularly at time

when the middle class is really suffering in this country," the former Massachusetts governor said. "This is a tough time for the people of America. But if you're a campaign contributor to Barack Obama your business may stand to get billions or hundreds of millions of dollars in cash from the government. I think it's wrong. I think it stinks to high heaven and I think the administration needs to explain how it is they would consider giving money to campaign contributors' businesses."

Romney's campaign supported his claim with references to news reports about federal money and loan guarantees that have benefited alternative energy companies run by Obama backers. Among those was Solyndra, a solar energy company that received a federal loan under Obama's economic stimulus but went bankrupt last year, laying off its 1,100 workers and leaving taxpayers on the hook for more than $500 million. An Obama campaign donor had invested millions of dollars in the company.

Obama's team dismissed Romney's latest criticism of the president.

White House spokesman Jay Carney noted that Republican-led House committees have examined potential conflicts and found no evidence of improper behavior

Obama campaign spokeswoman Jennifer Psaki, who joined Carney on Air Force One as the president flew to Ohio, said Romney was trying to change the subject to avoid the questions about his time at Bain Capital.

"He has created this cloud of secrecy around his campaign that I promise you people in states across the country are very concerned about," she said.

Obama, in a taped interview broadcast Monday on "CBS This Morning," was asked about the number of negative ads his campaign has been running against Romney.

Obama said "we've done a whole slew of positive ads" that talk about the need for changes to the education system and the tax code, rebuilding America and how to promote energy development.

"So those just don't get attention in the news," Obama said.

In fact, about three-fourths of the president's advertising so far has been critical of Romney.

"The president has only one thing going and that is constant attacks on me," Romney said. "They're dishonest, they're misdirected and I think the American people recognize that kind of politics is something of the past. It may work in Chicago, but it's not going to work across America."

Romney refused calls by Democrats — and some Republicans — to release several years of tax returns. He said the Obama campaign was only looking "for more things for their opposition research to make a mountain out of and to distort and to be dishonest about." Romney has released his 2010 return and has pledged to release a complete return for 2011, but no more.

Questions about Romney's tenure at Bain Capital, the fortune he earned there, foreign bank accounts and his refusal to release more of his tax returns have dogged the former Massachusetts governor. Romney insists he left the firm in February 1999 to take over the Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, but documents filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission indicate he was still in charge as late as 2001.

Romney's advisers on Sunday offered fresh explanations for the discrepancy.

"He actually retired retroactively at that point," Romney adviser Ed Gillespie said Sunday. "He ended up not going back to the firm after his time in Salt Lake City. So he was actually retired from Bain."

Romney's exact role at the firm between 1999 and 2001 is important not only because critics have raised questions about his truthfulness, but also because Bain was sending U.S. jobs overseas during the period. Romney has sought to distance himself from that period in Bain's history, saying on financial disclosure forms and in a recent blitz of TV interviews that he had no active role in the company as of February 1999.

"I had no role whatsoever in the management of Bain Capital after February of 1999," he said Friday. "I was an owner, and being a shareholder doesn't mean you're running the business."

That answer didn't satisfy Obama.

"Mr. Romney claims he's Mr. Fix-It for the economy because of his business experience, so I think voters entirely legitimately want to know what is exactly his business experience," Obama told WAVY-TV in Portsmouth, Va., in an interview taped Saturday and posted on the station's website Sunday.

"Mr. Romney is now claiming he wasn't there at the time except his filings with the SEC listing says he was the CEO, chairman and president of the company."

Gillespie appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press" and CNN's "State of the Union.

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