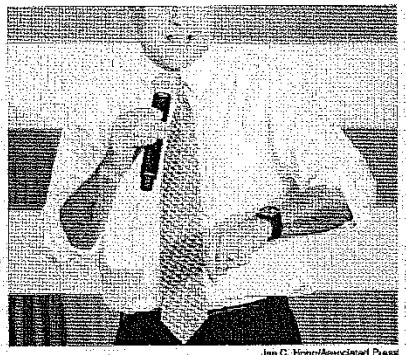
schoolmates because they were gay. His swift response reflected the Republican presidential candidate's recognition that his record on gay rights is under heightened scrutiny following President Barack Obama's embrace of gay marriage.

One day after gay rights moved to the center of the presidential race with Obama's announcement on same-sex marriage, a Washington Post report about Romney's high school escapades nearly 50 years ago added a personal dimension to Democrats' claim that he's out of step on the sensitive topic.

The newspaper reported that in one case, Romney and several schoolmates held down classmate John Lauber and cut off his bleached blond hair after seeking him out in his dorm room at their boarding school in the wealthy Detroit suburb of Bloomfield Hills, Mich. The Post said Lauber was "perpetually teased for his nonconformity and presumed homosexuality" and that he screamed for help as Romney held him down. The paper recounted another incident in which Romney shouted "atta girl" to a different student at the all-boys' school who, years later, came out as gay.



Joe C. Hong/Associated Press

Republican presidential candidate former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney speaks at a campaign stop in Omaha, Neb., Thursday.

"I participated in a lot of hijinks and pranks during high school and some may have gone too far. And for that I apologize," Romney told Fox News' Brian Kilmeade during a hastily arranged radio interview. Romney said he didn't remember the Lauber incident from long ago, but didn't dispute that it happened. He stressed that he didn't know either student was gay.

The Republican presidential candidate had begun the day by treading softly on Obama's historic embrace of same-sex marriage, which seems likely to fire up liberal and conservative activists alike. He quietly restated his opposition to legalizing the right to adopt children.

"States could have their own decisions with regards to the domestic partnership rights," Romney told Fox News. "But my preference would be to have a national standard for marriage, and that marriage would be defined as being between a man and a woman." the same sex are able to adopt children — in my view, that's something which people have the right to do."

The GOP candidate defended some gay rights when he ran for governor of Massachusetts but was a leading voice against gay marriage when courts made it legal in the state.

targeted students because they were gay.

"That was the furthest thing from our minds back in the 1960s, so that was not the case," he said, adding that the students involved "didn't come out of the closet until years later."

According to the Post account, Romney was upset about how Lauber wore his bleach-blond hair hanging into his eyes.

"He can't look like that. That's wrong. Just look at him!" Romney told Matthew Friedemann, a close Romney friend and one of five classmates who recalled the incident for The Post. A few days later, Romney led a group of boys out of his dorm room at Cranbrook School and into Lauber's, where the group tackled him and held him down. Romney cut his hair with scissors as a teary-eyed Lauber screamed for help.

"If there was anything I said that was offensive to someone, I certainly am sorry about that," he said, adding that "there was no harm intended." Romney's campaign has previously highlighted the candidate's reputation as a high school prankster in an attempt to humanize him.

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Obama: Romney 'backwards on equality'

BY JIM KUHNHENN
Associated Press

SEATTLE — President Barack Obama wasted little time casting Republican rival Mitt Romney as "backwards on equality" on Thursday, eager to transform his historic embrace of same-sex marriage into donor enthusiasm and grassroots vigor.

Just one day after announcing his support of the top gay rights issue, Obama was attending a lavish West Coast fundraiser hosted by actor George Clooney in Los Angeles' Studio City area, the heart of celebrity gay marriage activism. At the same time, his campaign rolled out a Web video claiming Romney would roll back some rights for same-sex couples.

White House spokesman Jay Carney brushed aside questions about the timing of the attack on Romney, saying that Obama and Romney had differed on issues of gay rights even before the president declared his support for same-sex marriage.

"Gov. Romney is for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would enshrine discrimination into our founding legal document," Carney said. "The president thinks that's wrong. So their positions were starkly different before yesterday."

In Seattle, where he was attending two fundraisers, Obama witnessed the support first hand as his motorcade passed a woman holding an infant and a sign that said: "Thank you! Mr. President for standing up for my mommys!"

He drew big cheers from supporters at Seattle's historic Paramount Theater when he said his vision for a better America applies to everyone, "no matter what you look like, no matter what your last name, no matter who you love."

Without referring directly to marriage, Obama expanded on the theme of same-sex equality.

"We are moving forward to a country where every American is treated with dignity and with respect and here in Washington you'll have the chance to make your voice heard on the issue of making sure that everybody, regardless of seku-

Gay marriage issue adds complexity in swing states

BY THOMAS BEAUMONT
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — President Barack Obama's support for gay marriage adds a new layer of complexity for voters — especially independents — in battleground states that will decide the race for the White House.

While the economy is certain to dominate the campaign over the next six months, gay marriage could have an impact at the margins in key states from Colorado to Ohio to Virginia by influencing voter turnout among important constituencies, among them minorities, young voters and evangelicals.

"It may cost you as many votes as it wins you," said Colorado Republican Greg Brophy, a state representative.

Advocates on both sides of the emotional issue agree Obama's pronouncement will stoke enthusiasm among core Democrats and Republicans, likely boosting turnout in the November election and fundraising ahead of it. The big unknown is where independent voters — and specifically those Obama struggles to win over, such as middle-class whites — land in the fewer than a dozen states expected to make a difference in the quest for the White House.

"Any little one thing could be the issue that turns Nevada one way or the other," said James Smack, a Republican National Committee member. He also could have been talking about the other states that are expected to be too close to call until the end, among them: Ohio, Florida, Virginia, Colorado, Iowa and New Hampshire.

National surveys show a majority Americans support legalizing gay marriage.

But most blacks — a core part of Obama's base — do not. And Obama needs them to turn out in huge numbers as they did four years ago in places like Cleveland, Richmond, Va., and Charlotte, N.C., in order to win in such battleground states. The same goes for Democratic-leaning Hispanic voters. Most of them oppose gay marriage, and their backing will be critical to Obama in cities such as Miami, Las Vegas and Denver.

At the same time, most evangelicals and other conservatives who make up the base of the GOP are strongly opposed to gay marriage. And Obama's position could end up unifying conservatives behind presumptive GOP nominee Mitt Romney, who has struggled to win them on his own. The former Massachusetts governor opposes gay marriage, but has spoken in favor of gay rights in the past.

It's an issue that motivates the GOP's conservative base to come out and vote, and that could have an impact in traditionally Republican states like Virginia and elsewhere.

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