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Mass. governor pushes S.C. gay marriage ban

Gov. Mitt Romney reportedly posturing for '08 prez run
 by Jim Baxter . Q-Notes staff

Through his political action committee, Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney has given SCformarriage.org — the organization that is leading efforts in South Carolina to ban gay marriage — \$5,000, its largest donation ever. He is the effort's first (and so far only) "campaign sponsor," a category reserved for major contributors.

Romney also plans to send out a fundraising letter on behalf of the initiative to about 150,000 South Carolinians in the next few weeks, according to a July 1 report in the *Boston Globe*, and is expected to headline an event for the organization after Labor Day.

"Romney's donation makes clear that the amendment here is not based in the best interests of South Carolinians, but based in a national agenda against gay people," said Ed Madden, chairman of the SC Equality Coalition (SCEC).

"It is a campaign driven by politics and crass opportunism, not a campaign based in what is best for South Carolina families."

South Carolina holds one of the most important Republican presidential primaries, and Romney has made several trips to the state, most recently on June 22.

Last month, a Utah newspaper reported Romney had raised more than \$1.6 million through a federal political action committee and five state PACs, including one from South Carolina that has raised \$144,830.

Romney's fundraising organization, the Commonwealth PAC, has already made thousands of dollars in contributions to GOP candidates and organizations in South Carolina.

Making this contribution to an anti-gay marriage organization is widely seen as just another effort in promoting himself in preparation for a possible 2008 presidential run. Romney's PAC has reportedly just hired a fundraiser and activist to build support in South Carolina.



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Asha Leong, manager of SCEC's "Fairness for All Families" campaign, told the press that the state doesn't take kindly to outsiders interjecting themselves into local affairs.

"The thing is that South Carolinians want to hear from other Southerners and other

people from South Carolina about what this is going to mean in our daily lives," she said.

"The real tragedy is that a person like Gov. Romney, who sees himself as a leader in

America, so callously disregards the lives of nearly a quarter million South Carolinians," said Warren Redman-Gress, executive director of South Carolina's Alliance For Full Acceptance (AFFA). "He's using our lives and the people we love as political stepping stones."

"It is shameful when a politician marginalizes citizens with ignorant rhetoric to turn out votes for his own campaign."

Mike Green, a South Carolina Republican activist, pointed out to the *Globe* that Drew McKissick — state director for SCformarriage.org — used to be political director of the Christian Coalition, which he said could give Romney access to a vast network of conservatives.

"We definitely appreciate the help of Gov. Romney and his PAC," McKissick told the press.

"I will continue to work to help preserve traditional marriage," Romney said in a statement released by SCforMarriage.org and reported on July 7 on CNN, "and I applaud this effort in South Carolina as well as others like it across the nation."

Romney's move, some observers say, could possibly inspire other similar efforts.

CNN's Mark Preston asked in a June 30 commentary, "Given the importance of the South Carolina presidential primary," will other Republicans eyeing the 2008 GOP nomination follow Romney's lead and weigh in financially on this issue?"

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