Romney on the Defensive

By Mel Lavine

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I got up early Sunday morning because I wanted to hear what Mitt Romney would say about the president's order to stop deporting some young immigrants, an estimated 800,000, who came to the U.S. as children.

A lot of people, myself included, don't think Obama has suddenly gone soft on illegals. In the more than three years that he has been in the White House, he has deported more than 1.1 million immigrants, the most by any president since the 1950s, according to the New York Times. But with less than five months before an election believed to be close, the president must have felt that his immigration policies risked chilling Latino enthusiasm. So he acted to keep this growing bloc of voters solidly on his side.

In courting the far right of his party during the Republican primary debates, Romney declared that, if elected, he would veto the so-called Dream Act, a path to citizenship for young immigrants who go to college or serve in the military. Romney sounded then as flinty as the most reactionary of his rivals. But, as they say that was then. On “Face the Nation,” when Bob Shaeffer reminded him of his promise, the former Massachusetts governor hedged:

“With regards to these kids who were brought in by their parents through no fault of their own, there needs to be a long-term solution so they know what their status is.”

He also said, ”What the president did – he should have worked on this years ago. If he felt seriously about this, he should have taken action when he had a Democratic House and Senate, but he didn’t. He saves these sort of things until four and a half months before the general election”

Not quite true. As the Times noted, the president supported passage of the Dream Act in 2010, but it was blocked by Senate Republicans.

His advisers have said that Romney is likely to make his position on immigration known when he speaks to a conference of elected and appointed Latino officials in Florida on Thursday. For the moment, Obama – who speaks to the same group after Romney – seems to have the upper hand in this debate, with Romney on the defensive.

Even so, on “Face the Nation,” Romney had the chutzpah to decry the president’s move on immigration as pure politics.

In the endless season of Republican debates the former Massachusetts governor vilified the Dream Act time and again, asserting that if he got to be president, it would be history. But Romney was not challenged in the interview, and I think an opportunity was missed. This was the first time that Romney had agreed to an interview on network television with a broadcasting company other than Fox News.

As it turned out, the most arresting moment of the show may have been when Schieffer mentioned the success of a dressage horse that Romney’s wife, Ann, co-owns – that is a horse trained in obedience and precision movement. It won a place on the U.S. Olympic team.

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