

Choking the Antichoice Minority

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ABOUT 1980 THE REPUBLICAN PARTY was hijacked by a band of dedicated and vocal antichoice fanatics. Not so long ago those same fanatics hijacked the high road on the abortion issue itself. They creatively constructed a public relations strategy designed to put us on the defensive using an issue created out of whole cloth—the so-called partial birth abortion. But instead of calling it what it was; the use of taxpayer money to conduct a public relations campaign, the prochoice movement moved courageously to protect women's lives and the doctor-patient privilege, but lost the PR battle.

So how do we get the high road back? Let me offer a couple of strategic ideas.

First, we must get the pollsters, all of them, to go back to asking the question, "*Who should decide—the woman or government—as to her reproductive health?*" Pollsters dropped that question in favor of the self-labeling question over 10 years ago. Many people are now confused as to what prochoice means, especially in the GOP. I can't tell you how many amusing conversations I have had with elected and appointed Republican officials who say "I don't agree with you on abortion," but

when you ask more, they say, "Oh, but I believe the woman should decide if she wants one or not." We need to remove the confusion.

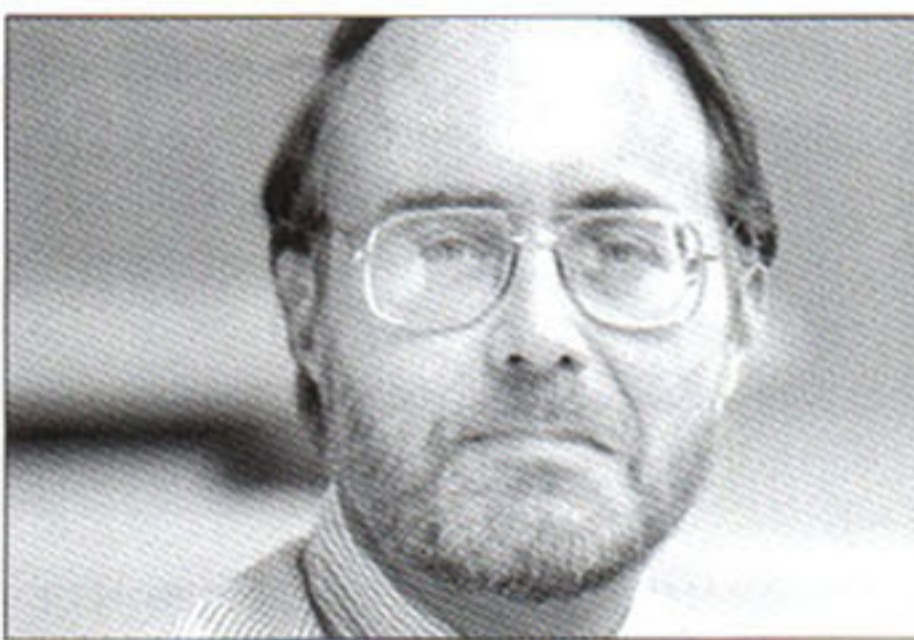
Second, we need to call the GOP's bluff on abortion. It keeps passing laws that chip away at the edges of *Roe*. The GOP is in the majority in both the House and the Senate and it has an antichoice president, so why hasn't it moved on the one piece of legislation that the Republican Platform holds up as the "solution," the so-called Human Life Amendment? Why? Because the debate on such an amendment that

would outlaw abortion 100 percent would kill the party. The HLA would mean women going to jail, most major forms of contraception would be outlawed and you would need a national registry of pregnant women to enforce it. Yeah, that would go over well with the women of America—they get turned in and put on a national registry when they get pregnant and in nine months they better have a baby, or a way to prove they had a natural miscarriage. Yeah, that would be a real political winner for the GOP! It was a big hit when they did it in Romania!

So how do we call their bluff? I have my ideas and would love to discuss them with the other leaders in the prochoice movement before announcing them here. We can do it but it would take a GOP effort. It will involve giving the GOP some of what the antichoice leaders in Congress think they want and watching them choke on it. ■

Stasis in the Abortion Debate is an Opportunity

David J. Garrow



DAVID GARROW is the author of *Liberty and Sexuality* (University of California Press, updated 1998), a comprehensive history of the reproductive rights struggle.

AN ENTIRE DECADE HAS NOW PASSED without any fundamental change in US abortion politics. That's right. Ever since the prochoice movement's last significant victory, the 1994 enactment of the federal

Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, the abortion struggle in this country has been in stasis.

Neither our opponents' creation of the "partial birth abortion" issue, nor the successful advent of medical, as opposed to surgical, abortion procedures have had the transformative impact that some observers predicted. True, the "partial birth" controversy has highlighted, and further strengthened, some prochoice voters' increasing ambivalence about abortion. But public opinion polling on abortion ever since *Roe v. Wade* has depicted a generally stable, if sometimes muddled, prochoice consensus.

Prochoice political dominance was most visible in the three years between the Supreme Court's highly-threatening 1989 decision in *Webster v. Reproductive*

Health Services and the Court's surprising reaffirmation of *Roe* in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* in 1992. But, ever since *Casey*, anti-choice politicians consistently have focused on secondary issues, such as "partial birth," rather than continue to mount the unsuccessful frontal attacks upon *Roe* that dominated the 1980s.

The most dramatic change of the past 10 years, yet one many activists on our side are loathe to acknowledge, never mind celebrate, is the tremendous decline in anti-abortion terrorism and harassment, in part because of the powerful provisions of the FACE statute. The disappearance of Randall Terry and Joseph Scheidler from the evening news may frankly be welcomed more by our opponents than by us, but there is no gainsaying that the prochoice movement in 2004 finds itself in far better circumstances than most of us could have imagined in 1991.

Our opponents may claim success in finally winning passage of the federal Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act, but that statute, like so many previous state enactments, will not survive constitutional review in the federal courts. Recent legal decisions have included some serious and major disappointments, such as the Supreme Court's refusal to upend an egregious appeals court decision in the *Greenville Women's Clinic* case from South Carolina, and the Sixth Circuit's vindication of an updated Ohio "partial birth" ban provision in *Women's Medical Professional Corp. v. Taft*, but our challenges at the moment frankly are more internal than external.

"Sky-is-falling" rhetoric in which prochoicers exaggerate the dangers we face in order to energize our supporters can have a harmful, self-fulfilling impact in the media and among elected officials. Nowadays political debates on abortion issues feature none of the novelty or creativity that we presently are witnessing in the remarkable, fast-moving national battle over the fundamental civil rights issue of same-sex marriage, but we need to husband our resilient, long-term political strength, and acknowledge our crucial, post-1990 victories, rather than over-expend valuable resources on short-term, consultant-driven media cam-

paigns and one-shot public events.

The cause of abortion rights is in a solid, and fundamentally static, legal and

political situation, even if that basic truth is one that most prochoicers decline to emphasize, or refuse to acknowledge. ■

There's More to Choice than *Roe*

Jennifer Heitel



JENNIFER HEITEL is a Communications Associate at CFFC. She founded and was president for two years of the George Washington University campus chapter of the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance and is a member of the Pro-choice Public Education Project's Young Women's Leadership Council.

A LOT OF CRITICISMS HAVE BEEN LEVELED at the reproductive rights movement for its inability to incorporate and attract support from young people. To give young women and men a stake in the movement, we need to expand the definition of reproductive rights and choice. We need to begin thinking of choice as the umbrella and incorporate into our language and actions the other social and human rights issues that many young people are equally passionate about: HIV/AIDS, freedom from violence, health care, GLBTQ issues, racial equality, peace, poverty, environmental justice and access to education including comprehensive sex education. These issues are intrinsically linked in the minds of youth and the movement of the future needs to reflect this.

For us, the reproductive rights movement is not just about preserving *Roe v. Wade*. To many young people, including me, *Roe* is the cornerstone of the movement—something we can all rally around in times of need.

But the movement also deals with other aspects of reproductive rights and health—issues like contraception, access to services and comprehensive sex education. These are just as important as preserving *Roe*. Our battle against restrictions such as parental notification, 24-hour waiting periods, abstinence-only education and the bans on specific methods of abortion also need as much attention as *Roe* does.

The movement needs to learn from those who have done well in involving young people. There are several excellent examples of programs that work: the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance campus program, the Pro-choice Public Education Project's media campaigns created by and geared towards young women, Advocates for Youth and its messages of respect and responsibility for young people and the annual From Abortion Rights to Social Justice conference organized by Hampshire College's Civil Liberties and Public Policy Program. The existence of organizations like these is the reason I am active in the movement. They decided early on that young women's ideas are important and integrated the issues that we care about under a framework that we could shape.

Young people need to be involved in every aspect of the movement, right up to the decision-making level. New campaigns and activities have to take into account the perspectives and realities of young people so that the ideas and images developed in the future resonate with us, giving us greater impetus to shape a movement that we can call our own—because we will have to run it, and live or die by its successes and failures. ■