



Special Reports

Autumn 1999

Life Decisions International

vol. ii • no. 4

"GROWING UP" OR GETTING SMART?

A Commentary by Douglas R. Scott and Penny Pullen

As campaign 2000 caucuses and primaries draw near, battle clouds loom in the war of ideas. This war is being fought by candidates, but not by candidates alone. It is also being waged within and among pro-life/pro-family leaders nationwide.

The Questions

A presidential election after eight years of the most pro-abortion president since *Roe v. Wade* is causing tension among pro-life leaders who are reconsidering the Movement's direction. Thinking it through is a priority; stakes are high, especially for babies who are being killed and mothers who are being injured. Yet the Pro-Life Movement may be no closer to an answer than it was more than a quarter-century ago on such key questions as:

- Is passage of the Paramount Human Life Amendment a realistic short- or long-range goal? Is it even necessary?
- Should the Pro-Life Movement support candidates who are quiet on the abortion issue, but who are expected to "do the right thing" once in office?
- Is it acceptable to vote for pro-abortion Republicans so the self-identified "pro-life party" can control Congress, thereby creating the possibility that our goals can be advanced?
- Is it wise to take incremental steps toward ending abortion-on-demand?

These questions are further divided into two parts: 1) What must we require of pro-life legislation? and 2) What must we require of candidates for public office?

In our view, if we are to be successful, the Movement must agree to basic standards both for legislation and for candidates. Yet some argue flexibility is a better path.

Pro-Life Legislation

Whether setting standards or developing strategy, the fundamental question is one on which there

seems to be near universal agreement. What is the long-term goal?

The second question is far more ticklish and remains open to debate—a debate that has not approached resolution in the 27 years since *Roe v. Wade* was forced upon the country by the Supreme Court. How do we achieve the long-term goal?

On one side of the battlefield in the war of ideas are those who may be called "Incrementalists." On the other side are those who may be called "Purists." Many others are somewhere in the middle.

Incrementalist strategy pursues passage of any legislation seeking to protect the lives of some babies. Incrementalists maintain such legislation serves to educate Americans on the cruel laxity of current law and on the practice of abortion itself, which will hopefully move the public toward embracing our goal of legally protecting the unborn. The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act is legislation advanced by the Incrementalist wing.

Purists propose legislation that includes no exceptions, arguing it is wrong to automatically concede lives of some unborn babies to abortionists. Purists also oppose setting members of Congress up for easy votes, which allow politicians to build records that confuse or mislead voters. Yet many concede "purist" legislation cannot pass in the foreseeable future, leaving the abortion industry unfettered.

It is not uncommon for those fully entrenched in one of these camps to view—and treat—those in the other as though they are "not really pro-life," or at least as though they are very unwise.

Purists are often ignored and consequently frustrated when they call for pro-life organizations to move closer to their position. But in crying for unity, they define "unity" as "everyone doing it my way." Their attitude is often expressed quite openly that Incrementalists are too willing to compromise with the enemy.

Incrementalists exhibit their own elitism, discounting Purists as “naïve and unrealistic about politics.” Yet Incrementalists tend to be reticent about placing lawmakers—even pro-life lawmakers—in difficult positions and holding them accountable. If a politician expresses preference for a weaker bill, compromise quickly follows. Their pragmatic goal is passage of a bill—any bill—and a loss in Congress is seen as defeat for the Movement rather than exposure of unsatisfactory officeholders. Lawmakers get off easy.

All or Nothing?

Both Incrementalists and Purists are right—and wrong. They have become so entrenched in their own positions, so willing to look at others as “part of the problem,” so unwilling even to consider points made by strategic “adversaries,” that resolution appears impossible.

Take legislative action, for example. We must all acknowledge that the progress achieved through legislation since 1973 is simply not substantial. We must not kid ourselves. Until *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* are no longer “the law of the land,” most legislation passed to regulate abortion would likely be struck down by the Supreme Court.

Even reversal of *Roe v. Wade* by the Supreme Court would not end abortions; it would likely just take America back to pre-*Roe* status when abortion was a state issue, leaving some states “slave” and others “free.” Mothers who wish to abort their children could simply travel to a state where abortion is lawful. Congress could legislate on the matter, but the life of the most defenseless human beings should not depend on the composition of Congress and the person who sits in the White House. After all, we are talking about the most fundamental unalienable right here—a right that should not come and go based on election returns.

Unless we expect the Supreme Court not only to reverse *Roe v. Wade*, but also to declare the unborn human being a “person” as used in the Constitution and therefore entitled to legal protection, some states and some congresses will continue to allow the killing of the unborn. Our goal must be to work diligently and tirelessly to educate America.

Even if highly popular legislation, such as banning partial-birth abortions, were ruled unconstitutional, some would contend the process itself would be

worth the effort. The educational purposes served can only help to bring us closer to the ultimate goal—constitutional protection via passage of the Paramount Human Life Amendment, defining personhood appropriately and thereby applying existing constitutional due process guarantees to every human being in the United States.

Yet Purists have a point that deserves respectful attention. Legislation offered to Congress must be “pure,” based on the principle of the humanity of the unborn child. If a bill is amended by the majority, we should go for all we can get, but only if the killing of some classes of children is not positively sanctioned by law. But some pro-life lobbyists are far too willing to initiate legislation that is flawed from the start—allowing politicians to avoid tough votes. This is self-defeating. Pro-life lobbyists must stop undercutting principle every time a politician squawks.

What’s more, the cause of life requires members of Congress to develop spines of their own. The Legislative Branch needs to understand that it is equal to the Executive. The President cannot force Congress to spend money to kill children. Continued compromise when it is unnecessary only serves to diminish the importance of electing an ostensibly pro-life majority to Congress.

The only sure way to protect the lives of the unborn by law is through a constitutional amendment, but this requires a massive consensus in public opinion. Notwithstanding polls showing most Americans do not support abortion-on-demand as secured by *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, far too many people continue to believe abortion should not be outlawed. The only way, then, to pass a constitutional amendment is to help bring about change in heart and attitude. To have any chance of changing the Constitution, we must change the culture. And there is no time to waste—lives are literally being lost every day.

Changing the culture requires a lot of education. Americans need to understand the horror and tragedy of abortion—for mothers, children, fathers, sisters, brothers, grandparents, and society as a whole. Massive, persuasive education campaigns need to be intensified. Yet what have we seen for the nearly \$80 million pro-life and pro-family organizations generate *each year*? Where has all of that money gone and what has it accomplished?

Americans need to be confronted with the schizophrenic nature of our society. In our hospitals doctors work to save a premature baby. Others perform delicate surgery to correct a heart defect in a baby while she is still sheltered in the womb. Happily, most such babies now survive. Yet in another room—often in the same hospital—colleagues of these heroic lifesavers work to kill a baby at the same stage of development. Similarly, we cannot pretend those in the womb are not human while harvesting their organs for transplant precisely because they are human. (Such logical disconnects ought to be obvious, but in our modern society it behooves those of us who can see to point out the illogic of these conflicts.)

We cannot overstate the constant need for everything done by the Pro-Life Movement to be heavily bathed in prayer—and this is not simply religiosity or faith-based rhetoric. Society has come to the point where no matter what facts are presented; no matter how persuasively and intelligently the arguments are made, they still do not seem to sink in with some people. While we need to continue giving the facts and educating people, we must always do so with the realization that prayer is also essential.

This is unquestionably a spiritual battle. Until God removes blindfolds, no amount of rhetoric or facts will impact a person's heart. It takes the changing of hearts to lead to action, not just the changing of minds. And this is far beyond the reach of mankind. We can work on the changing of minds. God will take care of the changing of hearts.

Candidates for Public Office

Not surprisingly, Incrementalists and Purists hold vastly differences of opinions when it comes to how the Pro-Life Movement should deal with candidates for public office. Incrementalists place great stock in conventional assessments of “electability” and will settle for candidates who are less than committed to the cause of Life, so long as their stands can be massaged into embracing at least some increments. Purists are just that, demanding an uncompromising stand from their candidates. At times, the war between the two camps takes on explicit terms and they challenge each other in painfully public arenas.

Pennsylvania Pro-Life Federation's Mary Beliveau, writing in National Right to Life

Committee's *NRL News*, argues, “It is time that we grow up as a movement. *The babies cannot afford another pro-abortion presidency.* Unfortunately, there are some within the pro-life movement that persist with their ‘rule or ruin’ strategy.”

Beliveau complained that pro-life candidate Gary Bauer “bashed other pro-life candidates [George W. Bush], and a pro-life group [American Life League] issued a press release that attacked National Right to Life because NRLC urged pro-life groups to focus on Al Gore's pro-abortion stand...The all-or-nothing strategy, done under the guise of ‘principle and pro-life,’ is deceptive.”

That strategy helps Al Gore get elected “and advances the pro-abortion agenda,” Beliveau argues. “The question we must ask ourselves is: ‘Are my actions and vote advancing the pro-life cause or setting it back?’”

Mary Matuska writes in American Life League's *Celebrate Life* that, “[George W.] Bush and [Elizabeth] Dole claim to be ‘pro-life,’ but support keeping abortion legal...namely when the baby is conceived through rape or incest. To Bush and Dole, these babies are non-persons. Bush even goes so far as to state that it should be legal for these children to be killed during all three trimesters of pregnancy.”

“That's pro-life?” Matuska asks. “Since when is violently killing a defenseless baby for the crime of his father ‘pro-life’? Well, according to some pro-lifers, namely the National Right to Life Committee, that position is just fine.”

Matuska, director of Pro-Life Wisconsin, suggests that, “It's time for those of us who believe that every unborn baby is precious to stand up and say ‘Enough is Enough!’ It is not pro-life to sanction the killing of certain children for any reason, especially for political expediency.”

Matuska suggests that any politician who supports abortion against children conceived in rape or incest should earn a “mixed” record label at best, not a “pro-life” label. “It's also time to tell those pro-life organizations who insist on supporting these candidates through public announcements of support or endorsements, that they too have forsaken the true meaning of ‘pro-life’ with their misguided actions.” Matuska writes that “victory will come through steadfast commitment to the truth—it won't come through hollow political

victories or the election of deluded politicians who want to ride both sides of the fence.”

Both writers specifically condemn the “if you’re not with us, you’re against us” attitude, yet both seem to hold it.

All or Nothing?

We do not claim to be political geniuses, but it seems to us that history and even a study of contemporary political thought tells the Pro-Life Movement that we still have no clue how to influence politicians and political races. Yet there are so many examples before us—models of effective “single-issue” lobbies—from whom we can learn if we look beyond our own focus.

Look at Big Labor. What does it take for a candidate to be endorsed by a labor union? Are labor unions willing to endorse and invest in candidates who are a scant .001 percent more pro-union than the others?

Take Planned Parenthood and National Abortion & Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL). What does it take to be backed by Planned Parenthood or NARAL? Are these organizations willing to endorse, coddle, and provide cover for candidates who are marginally more pro-abortion?

Look at the National Rifle Association (NRA). What does it take to win NRA backing? Is the NRA willing to endorse and promote candidates that are barely more pro-gun than the others?

The answer is obvious. Of all these interest groups, pro-life leaders stand alone in their willingness to grant the “one of us” label to some of the worst candidates. And we pay the price after the elections. It is the Pro-Life Movement that is willing to give in to politicians. We earn no respect along the way. Just whine a little, politicians think, and the pro-lifers will back off and let them get away with murder.

You will *never* see the AFL-CIO, Teamsters, National Education Association or *any* other special interest group that is respected by lawmakers doing so. These groups have a standard and politicians who meet it are supported. Those who do not meet the standard are left to fend for themselves. It’s that simple.

When New Hampshire Senator Bob Smith left the Republican Party, Roger Stenson, executive

director of New Hampshire Citizens for Life, said he appreciated “what Bob Smith has done for unborn children,” but “the only tactical accomplishment will be to make the election of Al Gore or Bill Bradley more likely.”

Are pro-lifers essentially “forced” into supporting a candidate who is merely less pro-abortion than the other? Only if we are willing to be pushed to the back of the political bus. The problem is that the Pro-Life Movement begs candidates to support it as much as possible, rather than educating them and then expecting candidates to *earn* our support.

Eagle Forum president Phyllis Schlafly said Smith’s departure from the GOP, “should be a wake-up call to the Republican establishment.” Yet that establishment is not about to listen to a “wake-up” call from a group it does not respect.

Indeed, if it is to respect itself, the Pro-Life Movement will just have to stay out of certain political contests and let the chips fall where they may. But will not this mean that men like Al Gore could defeat the likes of George W. Bush (whom most say is at least better than Gore)?

Unfortunately, Bush has never really sought support from the Pro-Life Movement. He acts as though he simply expects support from his party’s pro-lifers. No Republican nominee can win the presidency without adequate pro-life backing.

Bob Smith may have come back to his party, but pro-life firebrand Patrick Buchanan has now shaken the dust from his shoes and beckoned to his so-called “Buchanan Brigades” of loyalists to follow him down a third-party path. The GOP cannot retain the pro-lifers to whom Buchanan beckons merely by vilifying him, fervent as it appears to be in shouting “good riddance” to its former devotee. It can hope to hold Buchanan’s pro-life Republican followers—who could well represent the margin of victory—only by offering the American people a choice, not an echo of Bill Clinton’s agenda.

Willing To Support Those Unwilling To Commit?

NRLC and many of its affiliates have called upon pro-life Americans to refrain from criticizing candidates it deems to be sufficiently pro-life. But this wish is going unheeded by many in the Pro-Life Movement. After all, they reason, NRLC even referred to then-candidate Bob Dole as a pro-life

“hero.” It soon became clear how important (or unimportant) the abortion issue was to the 1996 Republican nominee.

NRLC has urged activists and candidates to focus on the pro-abortion position of Al Gore (as though Gore has made it a secret or is shying away from discussing the matter) rather than criticizing fellow Republicans. Doing otherwise helps Gore get elected President, NRLC’s leaders theorize, and that “advances the pro-abortion agenda.”

But we must remember NRLC’s warning: “*The babies cannot afford another pro-abortion presidency.*” On the other hand, can the unborn afford another weak “pro-life” presidency?

Pro-life backing of weak Republicans has given us a Court that actually reaffirmed *Roe v. Wade*. It may be better to be stabbed in the chest by our enemies, than in the back by our “friends.”

While NRLC has provided cover for and clearly expressed favor for George W. Bush, it has been unsuccessful at convincing other pro-life leaders to rally behind the Texas governor. Bush has been unwilling to make any substantial commitments to pro-life leaders. “Trust me,” are the words of the day—with a wink and a nod.

Yet Gore is specific. “I would not use a litmus test,” he said to ABC’s Cokie Roberts on *This Week*, “but you could rest assured that a Supreme Court majority appointed in a Gore Administration would support a woman’s right to choose.” (That is like saying, “I won’t call it a candle, but it’s made of wax and has a wick at the end that one could set aflame.”) A Gore campaign aide admitted the vice president was trying to make clear his intentions without using the words “litmus test.”

In the Republican field, only Steve Forbes, Alan Keyes and Gary Bauer have committed to appointing pro-life justices to the Supreme Court. The purported frontrunners, Bush and Arizona Senator John McCain, will not do so.

After Bush skipped the Iowa Right to Life convention last month in Des Moines, there was no criticism from Mona Yentes, the group’s lobbyist. “Certainly, pro-lifers would like to see Governor Bush be more outspoken on the issue,” Yentes told a newspaper. She conceded that Bauer, Forbes and Keyes are more open in their opposition to abortion. “Of course, compared to Gary Bauer,

Bush looks moderate,” Yentes said. “Compared to Al Gore, he’s conservative.”

Backing Ourselves Into A Corner

Mona Yentes is urging pro-life advocates to vote their consciences at the January 24, 2000, presidential precinct caucuses. However, given Bush’s record, she said, those in the Pro-Life Movement should be prepared to support Bush or any GOP nominee against either Al Gore or Bill Bradley, who support abortion-on-demand.

But not so fast. NRLC has been most critical of McCain due to his vociferous support of campaign finance reform. NRLC leaders view him as a horrible candidate. Yet McCain and Bush have similar records on actual pro-life questions. McCain has a rather pro-life voting record as a member of the Senate, although in recent months McCain has distanced himself from the Pro-Life Movement. In August, McCain said that “certainly in the short term, or even the long term,” he would not support the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* because doing so would “force X number of women in America to (undergo) illegal and dangerous operations.” (McCain later said he would support the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*.)

Granted, McCain is surely at least somewhat better than Gore or Bradley (on banning partial-birth abortion, halting the trafficking in organs of aborted babies, and other “popular” proposals), but would NRLC enthusiastically endorse and work for McCain were he actually to become the Republican nominee? If the basic standard is simply that a candidate be better than Gore or Bradley, would not NRLC’s usual practice require it to support McCain? Or is there even a minimum standard?

Should McCain be the nominee, is not NRLC’s constant barrage of attacks on McCain helping Gore or Bradley to get elected? And why is NRLC angered by attacks on Bush by pro-life leaders and candidates but not attacks by the same people on Forbes, Buchanan, Keyes, Bauer and, yes, McCain?

What happens if Bush begins to falter? Will NRLC increase its support of Bush or search for another candidate to support in an effort to stop McCain? Will it be a “too little, too late” effort, particularly since NRLC has been unable to convince most other pro-life leaders to back Bush?

Of course, these problems can only exist if we do not set a minimum standard for candidates. If such a standard exists, those who do not meet it are automatically disqualified for support—even if we are not left with much of a choice.

Selecting A Candidate

It seems to us that pro-life organizations should be able to agree on asking some basic questions of all candidates for president and on expecting satisfactory answers. You can answer these questions yourself. Will the candidate you support:

- veto legislation if it includes any money that will go to Planned Parenthood?
- veto funding of fetal tissue and stem cell research that kills human embryos?
- veto funding of overseas population control and abortion advocacy organizations?
- support the Paramount Human Life Amendment and other truly protective legislation?
- nominate federal judges who will specifically respect the sanctity of human life?
- actively oppose physician-abetted suicide?
- insist that their party platform have a pro-life plank?
- actively engage Communist China's dictators on its one-child policy?
- proudly defend the rights of the unborn (without being forced to do so)?

If the answer to even one of these questions is “no,” what makes the candidate think he or she deserves your support? Does the candidate deserve your support at all? Has the candidate *earned* it? Has the candidate made it clear that he or she believes your vote is valuable?

Only Bauer, Buchanan, Forbes and Keyes have answered all questions in the affirmative. Once a candidate passes the test, the next question should be: Which candidate has the best chance to win so our goals can be advanced? Here we must think strategically and with our minds, not necessarily going with our first preference.

The Pro-Life Movement cannot continue on the same path of “settling”—continued willingness to accept the “lesser of two evils.” Willingness to embrace anyone who claims to be “pro-life,” but is a scant .001 percent less pro-abortion than his or her opponent is not practical. It is not “grown-up” politics. It is an impediment to our goal of justice

and mercy, due process protection, for all innocent human life. And it is a major reason our progress in the legal/political realm has been so substantively insignificant.

If leaders of the pro-life movement continue to play politics the way many have for the past quarter-decade, we can expect the same results and the same cynical behavior from politicians whose commitment we require...for the sake of protecting “the least of these.”

Where Do We Go From Here?

While debate about strategy is surely in order, it is important that everyone be willing to listen to the views of others fighting for the same cause and be willing to adjust their strategic viewpoint when reason dictates. It appears to us that neither “side” of the strategy has all the answers, but each has at least part of the answer. Yet many leaders are so entrenched in their point of view that they are not open to even considering the thoughts of others.

Needless-to-say, such diverse thinkers have never been able to sit down in a room together and hash out their differences in an effort to come together, although this has been tried in the past. After all, we must respect each other before we could hope to do so. All pro-life leaders can surely see that we all have something to learn—from our foes and from our allies.

It seems that caring pro-life Americans agree on one thing: they are tired of fighting among pro-life organizations. LDI often gets letters about this frustration and we understand it. But only God can diminish the egos and open the hearts and minds of those who truly feel they are right—those who have held the same positions for 27 years. Only He can open our eyes to His way. It is our place—our duty—to be willing to look, listen, and obey.

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Special Reports, an official publication of Life Decisions International, is published quarterly. Subscribers also receive LDI's newsletter, *The Caleb Report*, which is published six times per year. A minimum donation of \$25 per year is requested. Commentaries are designed to stimulate critical thought and may not represent the views of LDI's staff or board. For more information write to LDI at P.O. Box 907, Washington, DC 20044-0907. Thanks for your support!

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