

# [***Like a Child-Voiced Tradwife, Senator Katie Britt Embodied the Christian Right's Expectations of Womanhood | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BJF-H4X1-JBR6-900Y-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** The up-pitched girlish voice parrots submissive smallness demanded of women in churches that place men in authority over women.

**Body**

America is still recovering from Alabama Senator Katie Britt's unblinking [*declaration*](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/read-sen-katie-britts-full-response-to-the-state-of-the-union): "Right now, the American Dream has turned into a nightmare." Between her diamond-loaded cross, rebutting the State of the Union from her eerily empty kitchen, and resorting to a childlike patter, Britt exemplified a slim model of feminine acceptability within right-wing ***politics*** and evangelical Christianity's protracted marriage.

Women have long been useful mouthpieces for conservative values in America, particularly when those values limit women's rights and roles. While second wave feminists protested and led consciousness-raising groups in the 1960s and '70s, their fiercest foe was Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative Christian who organized women around kitchen tables to stymie the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), warning the ERA would lead to same-sex bathrooms, women in combat, and [*obliterate*](https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/sermonizing-pearls-phyllis-schlafly-womens-history-religious-right/) God's divine balance by writing sexual neutrality into law.

Schlafly was not anathema to personal power—she ran for U.S. [*Congress*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/congress?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) twice (though lost). She did know how to play submissive for conservative circles. Before speaking engagements, and to the ire of feminists she debated, Schlafly [*thanked*](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/06/obituaries/phyllis-schlafly-conservative-leader-and-foe-of-era-dies-at-92.html) her husband for allowing her to speak. She and her lieutenants made and delivered baked goods to legislators to endear them to their cause.

In the Republican rebuttal to President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s State of the Union address, Britt [*introduced*](https://streaklinks.com/B46oDmqoKEb4mp_T7gBxpPJd/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.pbs.org%2Fnewshour%2Fpolitics%2Fread-sen-katie-britts-full-response-to-the-state-of-the-union) herself as a U.S. Senator, but "that's not the job that matters most. I'm a proud wife and mom of two school-aged kids." Likewise, Schlafly, an architect of the Religious Right, often [*called*](https://streaklinks.com/B46oDmqtbVJuDklbVgb86bHX/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.womenshistory.org%2Feducation-resources%2Fbiographies%2Fphyllis-schlafly) herself a homemaker and listed her occupation as "mother."

Those who have observed Christianity's far-right edge only at a distance may recognize its strict gender ideology through extreme policies—or reality TV. Television's Duggar family, headed by Jim Bob Duggar (a former Arkansas state representative), paraded plentiful, homeschooled children (19 and counting!). Mother Michelle Duggar served as a vessel for all those blessings and swooned supportively of her husband's views. She also used a pinched, [*childlike tone*](https://streaklinks.com/B46oDmqIiGgE1fXk5w8AjjhP/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.yahoo.com%2Fentertainment%2Fmichelle-duggar-voice-real-amy-164946488.html%23%3A%7E%3Atext%3DWhy%2520Does%2520Michelle%2520Duggar%2520Speak%2Cherself%2520sound%2520meek%2520and%2520mild.), as if held under her husband's authority, her voice too had been bound.

Writer Tia Levings, author of the forthcoming *A Well-Trained Wife: My Escape from Christian Patriarchy,* pointed out that what some [*described*](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fundie-baby-voice_l_65eb6b2fe4b05ec1ccd9e9b9) as Britt's "fundie baby voice" is [*similar to*](https://tialevings.substack.com/p/fundie-baby-voice-isnt-what-we-called) the "vocal training and forced modulation" many women experience in fundamentalist Christian sects. Women are [*coached*](https://www.instagram.com/tialevingswriter/reel/C4ZFG4eL52Y/) to "keep sweet" and display a "gentle spirit" by disposition and voice.

It's the antithesis of authority-challenging vocal fry.

As [*plentiful memes*](https://www.dailydot.com/debug/amy-coney-barrett-voice-memes/) will attest, [*Supreme Court*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/supreme-court?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Justice [*Amy Coney Barrett*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/amy-coney-barrett?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s "little girl voice" is a striking mismatch for the influence of her station.

The up-pitched girlish voice parrots submissive smallness demanded of women in churches that place men in authority over women. Yet for listeners within these communities, the code-switch to docile mother, daughter, helpmeet resonates clearly.

Mothers play a vital role in building the political infrastructure that believers in Christian patriarchy (softened as [*"complementarianism"*](https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/healthy-gender-roles-in-marriage/)) support. Some have shaped their lives around homeschooling their children and even allow those kids to be [*organized*](https://streaklinks.com/B46oDm6oaCP4TkomDQ_RW4QA/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.reuters.com%2Farticle%2Fus-usa-election-cruz-homeschoolers-idUSKCN0W22D2%2F) as foot soldiers for Republican campaigns. Some families [*dream*](https://buckscountybeacon.com/2023/06/christian-homeschooling-crusader-michael-farris-opposes-womens-reproductive-rights-lgbtq-rights-and-childrens-rights/) that their children will grow up to become the [*Joshua Generation*](https://generationjoshua.org/about/history) and lead the country.

When [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) ran for office in 2016, it was amid a barrage of sexual assault [*allegations*](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/14/us/politics/donald-trump-women.html) and the "Grab 'em by the pussy" [*tape*](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/donald-trump-tape-transcript.html). Seventy-five percent of white evangelical women [*voted*](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/white-evangelical-gender-gap/story?id=59036921) for him anyway. At election time, many voiced a ***politics*** of ends-justifying-means: Trump promised he would nominate Supreme Court justices who would bring an end to *Roe*. To be clear, conservative Christian women have abortions, too. When I attended the Southern Baptist Convention's 2022 Annual Convention, one staffer for the [*Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission*](https://erlc.com/) (SBC's public policy arm) pointed out that 1 in 3 women in SBC's churches had had abortions.

Political commentators often ask why people vote against their interests. A better question: Why do people support leaders—religious or political—who oppose their full personhood or rights? Sometimes it's to protect the crumb of power they do have.

Better yet, if you can, do it with a smile.

Britt performed femininity like a [*tradwife*](https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/27/us/tradwife-1950s-nostalgia-tiktok-cec/index.html) influencer. On [*Instagram*](https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2024/march-web-only/tradwife-influencer-movement-fundamentalism-christian.html), tradwives coach their followers on happy homemaking, submitting to their husbands, and foregoing career—while building their own businesses as content creators. Britt plastered on a smile (and occasional, passionate shock) and pretended to be just another busy mom—inside the apparatus of the United States [*Senate*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/senate?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). Scratch that. From inside her kitchen.

Britt could have risen to the moment as an orator, or at least not faked battling back tears, or [*misrepresented a sex trafficking survivor's story*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/09/journalist-accuses-katie-britt-child-sex-abuse-story). Instead, she embodied what Christian patriarchy identifies as women's nature: scared, needing male protection, residing in her kitchen. It was a farce. It's always been a farce. But when enough people believe in it, just like with Christian nationalism, it becomes a reality in our ***politics*** that without check can slip toward becoming a civil rather than a niche religious norm.

*Sarah Stankorb is the author of the national best-seller* Disobedient Women: How a Small Group of Faithful Women Exposed Abuse*,* Brought Down Powerful Pastors*,* and Ignited an Evangelical Reckoning*. Her work has appeared in* The Washington Post*,* Slate*,* The Atlantic*,* Marie Claire, *and many other publications.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2362480/senator-katie-britt-listens.jpg)

**Graphic**

Senator Katie Britt listens

Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

Senator Katie Britt (R-Ala.) listens during a news conference on border security at the U.S. Capitol Building on Sept. 27, 2023, in Washington, D.C.

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