**Abortion: Why Republicans are Fighting the Wrong Fight**

Author: Fangwei Jin from Edgemont Junior-Senior High School

Unlike social issues such as gay marriage and illegal immigration, Americans are largely divided on the issue of abortion access. In fact, some polls indicate that Americans are shifting to the right on the issue⁠1 . So why, then, are many establishment Republicans so uncomfortable talking about the issue? The answer is simple: the pro-life movement has dictated the issue for too long, infusing the abortion debate with social conservative and religious values that are mostly unpopular with the broader populace. It’s why liberals love it when prominent Republicans justify staunch pro-life positions by claiming that rape is “God’s will” and that the female body can just “shut down” in the event of rape; it feeds perfectly into the broader argument of the Republican “war on women” and the GOP’s social intolerance. We saw the ludicrous of such a position in the January abortion debacle in the House, where a bill that sought to make abortion access more difficult for raped women was pulled by outraged female House Republicans. Yet the incident also pointed the potential of a shift in Republican tactics as younger, more secular Republicans gain more prominence over Tea Party extremists. Instead of demonizing women and limiting access to abortion services, Republicans should use their pro-life stance to support women by passing policies that could limit the abortion rate and make it easier for a woman to raise a child. This would not only eliminate liberal attacks of the Republican “war on women,” but would also reveal the dynamism of the party without sacrificing cherished conservative values.

The pro-life movement’s current strategies mirror those of the 1970s, lobbying for legislation that undermine the decision of Roe vs. Wade, which granted every woman the right to an abortion in the 1st trimester of her pregnancy. Targeted regulations of abortion providers (TRAP) are designed to shut abortion clinics down. These regulations, which include high fees for registering a clinic and arbitrary safety provisions such as increased hallway width, have severely limited the amount of available abortion clinics. Access to clinics is especially limited in the South; six states now have only one abortion clinic.⁠2 In fact, North Dakota restricts abortion access to six weeks, only halfway into the first trimester of pregnancy, a clear violation of Roe v. Wade. While this aggressive rollback on abortion access has decreased the number of legal abortions, the tactic is still failing. The public demand for abortions continue to skyrocket, as conservative legislatures have coupled a decrease in abortion access with policies that cause women to seek an abortion in the first place. This is best seen in Mississippi, where women are denied comprehensive sex education and programs that support pregnant and potential parent teenagers. Cuts to entitlement programs like Medicare make it financially impossible to poor families to support new children; the poverty rate in Mississippi is a shocking 22.3%.⁠3 Right-wing “crisis pregnancy centers,” which seek to a “counsel” a woman out of getting an abortion, are failing as well, as women rarely change their minds about getting an abortion. In fact, stresses such as these sessions and waiting periods only add to a woman’s emotional trauma.⁠4

The solution to the abortion debacle is simple, and it’s been proven in countless other countries--create a society that is receptive to child-bearing. The reason for low abortion rates despite liberal abortion laws in countries like Germany and the Netherlands is that both have laws that reduce the burden placed upon mothers. In Germany, working women receive 14 weeks of maternity with pay from the state,⁠5 and young children are guaranteed free child care.⁠6 Increased availability of contraceptives and better healthcare in general are also easy solutions to the exploding abortion problem in the US, yet conservatives are cutting access to both. Republicans, for too long, have been fighting a losing battle; coupling pro-life arguments with outdated, absolutist moral values that no longer resonate with the American people and provide ample ground for liberal criticism on feminist grounds. Shifting the pro-life position to one that supports women in improving the conditions that make abortions necessary in the first place will not only give Republicans the upper edge in the debate, but also bring political capital for their willingness to compromise and evolve. The moral conformism of the mid-20th century is long gone--it’s about time Republicans recognize this reality.

1 Cooke, Charles C. W. The Conservatarian Manifesto: Libertarians, Conservatives, and the Fight for the Right's Future. 160.: n.p., n.d. Print.

2 Florsheim, Lane. "Here's Proof That the Anti-Abortion Movement Is Winning." New Republic. N.p., 30 July 2014. Web. 30 May 2015.

3 Walker, Jazmine. "Enough Is Enough: Repeal Hyde Now." RH Reality Check. N.p., 29 Sept. 2014. Web. 28 May 2015.

4 Culp-Ressler, Tara. "STUDY: Even When Abortion Inspires Mixed Emotions, Women Say It Was The Right Decision For Them." *ThinkProgress RSS*. N.p., 06 Aug. 2013. Web. 28 May 2015.

5 Frum, David. "Let's Get Real about Abortions - CNN.com." CNN. Cable News Network, 29 Oct. 2012. Web. 28 May 2015.

6 Horn, Heather. "The Real Stakes of Today's Child-Care Debates in the U.S. and Germany." The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, 27 Apr. 2012. Web. 27 May 2015.