Abortion United Evangelicals and Republicans. Now That Alliance Is Fraying.

0:01

from The New York Times I'm Sabrina

0:03

tavernes and this is the

0:05

[Music]

0:12

daily the Southern Baptist convention

0:14

the largest Protestant denomination in

0:16

the country voted at its annual

0:19

Gathering last week to condemn IVF

0:21

fertility

0:23

treatments today my colleague Ruth

0:26

Graham on the story behind the vote the

0:30

Republicans scramble it prompted and

0:32

what it could eventually mean for the

0:34

rest of the

0:35

[Music]

0:37

country it's Monday June

0:42

17th so Ruth you write about religion

0:45

for the times and you were covering the

0:47

big annual meeting of Southern Baptists

0:49

last week and they made a pretty big

0:51

decision tell us about

0:53

it the Southern Baptist convention it's

0:56

the biggest Protestant denomination in

0:58

the United States they have almost 15

1:00

million members more than 45,000

1:02

churches it's a huge group and they also

1:06

consider these resolutions on what they

1:08

see as important cultural and political

1:11

topics and those discussions are really

1:13

important because you know Southern

1:16

Baptists know their political power and

1:18

they are basically a barometer of of

1:20

Evangelical sentiment in the US you know

1:23

what they say kind of indicates what the

1:25

typical Evangelical cares about in any

1:27

given moment and fund for report ERS

1:30

they all meet once a year in this giant

1:33

Gathering that any church can send

1:35

delegates to the delegates are called

1:37

Messengers so this year that meeting was

1:39

in Indianapolis there were almost 11,000

1:42

Messengers there in the convention

1:44

center and one of the important

1:46

political topics they took on this year

1:48

was something they have never discussed

1:50

as a full body before and that's the

1:52

ethics of invitro

1:54

fertilization okay so this very

1:56

important Conference of Southern

1:58

Baptists takes up IVF and words you know

2:00

the medical procedure that allows people

2:02

to get pregnant through Fertilization in

2:04

a lab so what do they

2:07

say so a lot of Southern Baptists

2:11

historically have not taken issue with

2:13

IVF per se at all they view it as a

2:16

technology used to create life you know

2:18

it's used by families who desperately

2:20

want to be parents and they view that as

2:23

a positive thing but the procedure does

2:26

involve typically the production of more

2:28

embryos than will be used used by the

2:30

couple that created them um and those

2:32

embryos end up sometimes discarded

2:35

sometimes Frozen indefinitely sometimes

2:37

donated but not sort of used in the way

2:39

that they were originally created to be

2:41

used so some Southern Baptists do take

2:44

issue with discarding those excess

2:46

embryos and the reason is they say life

2:49

begins at conception this sort of a core

2:52

anti-abortion belief the moment that the

2:55

sperm meets the egg that is the stuff of

2:57

life there's a verse in song Ms you

3:00

created my inmost being you knit me

3:02

together in my mother's womb and you'll

3:05

hear that cited in Christian

3:07

anti-abortion spaces a lot as evidence

3:10

that God cares about and Views as fully

3:14

human human beings at the very moment of

3:16

conception and that would include these

3:18

Frozen

3:19

embryos right if you truly believe that

3:22

life begins at conception you probably

3:24

would not agree to abortion at any stage

3:26

of gestation and that same logic would

3:29

apply IVF so when this issue gets raised

3:32

at the conference what happens what are

3:35

people saying so there's a resolution

3:37

that comes to the floor resolutions in

3:40

southern baptist language are

3:41

non-binding this would not be a ban it's

3:43

just a statement of concern that's meant

3:46

to summarize Southern Baptist opinion on

3:49

this particular topic so the language

3:51

that's proposed calls on Southern

3:53

Baptist to reaffirm the value of human

3:56

life and then it Narrows in on human

3:59

life in an embryonic stage and it urges

4:02

them to just use reproductive

4:04

Technologies fertility treatments that

4:05

are consistent with that view of human

4:08

life what does that mean they're

4:10

actually walking a pretty fine line here

4:12

they stop short of saying that a

4:14

southern baptist should never use IVF

4:17

under any circumstances they're calling

4:19

attention to these excess embryos and

4:22

saying that you know Baptists really

4:24

should only use reproductive

4:26

technology with attention to life at

4:29

this embryonic stage and the resolution

4:32

also goes so far as to ask Baptists to

4:35

call on their governments to restrain

4:37

these kind of technologies that violate

4:39

the Dignity of you know as they put it

4:41

quote Frozen embryonic human beings H so

4:44

they're also actually asking people to

4:47

pressure their governments to respect

4:49

this position basically that's right

4:51

it's light on specifics but that's the

4:53

suggestion but Ruth why did they decide

4:55

to raise this issue now I mean IVF

4:58

obviously has been around for a long

5:00

time right so back in February there was

5:04

a case that reached the Alabama Supreme

5:06

Court that had started when a group of

5:09

families in the state filed this

5:12

wrongful death claim over a mistake at a

5:14

fertility clinic where their Frozen

5:16

embryos were accidentally destroyed they

5:19

Sue and the state supreme court ends up

5:21

ruling not only in their favor but says

5:24

really clearly that Frozen embryos

5:26

should be considered children so the the

5:29

chief tce writes even before birth all

5:31

human beings have the image of God and

5:34

their lives cannot be destroyed without

5:36

effacing his glory so really putting out

5:39

this religious argument for human life

5:41

in embryonic form so that case lands

5:44

like a

5:45

bomb the stunning decision from

5:48

Alabama's Supreme Court has enormous and

5:50

immediate consequences for fertility

5:52

care and it really caught a lot of

5:54

people off guard you know all along the

5:56

Spectrum a third Fertility clinic in

5:58

Alabama has shut down after the state

6:00

Supreme Court ruled embryos are children

6:03

the court offered no clear road map for

6:05

what is and isn't legal and it just

6:08

places this question about the ethics

6:12

and the legal aspects and all of this it

6:14

just puts IVF into the national

6:16

conversation we're concerned that with

6:18

the new ruling we may have to limit

6:20

fertilization of eggs which will limit

6:23

success of treatment limit efficiency

6:26

increased cost and of course risk to

6:28

patients it's a stress process already

6:31

and I don't need the added stress of and

6:33

no other woman does of whether or not

6:36

this might be moral to go through to

6:38

have children when this is my only path

6:40

and there's this really strong backlash

6:43

to the idea that embryos should be

6:45

protected with the force of the law as

6:47

full human beings because IVF is broadly

6:50

popular including among many Republican

6:53

voters Alabama House of Representatives

6:55

and the Senate have passed a law that

6:57

restores access to in rro fertilization

7:01

doctors at clinics have told ABC News

7:03

the new language will give them enough

7:04

reassurance to resume IVF without facing

7:08

legal

7:09

[Music]

7:12

risks ultimately the state legislature

7:15

the Republican Governor you know work

7:17

really quickly to reinstate it in the

7:19

state but it opens up this new

7:22

conversation among conservative

7:24

evangelicals who are broadly

7:27

anti-abortion and they're starting to

7:29

think think you know should we think

7:31

about this IVF conversation in the same

7:33

way that we've thought about abortion

7:35

should we be pushing on this more so

7:37

most of the country takes the lesson

7:39

from the Alabama case that IVF is not

7:42

something to be interfered with but for

7:44

some in the Evangelical Community they

7:46

take the opposite lesson it sounds like

7:48

that's right for some evangelicals this

7:50

feels like the perfect moment to bring

7:54

IVF into the abortion conversation and

7:56

start to turn the tide again it one of

8:00

these people is an neths in Kentucky his

8:03

name is Andrew Walker he works at

8:05

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

8:07

it's a major Southern Baptist seminary

8:09

in Louisville and he's been wanting to

8:13

bring IVF into sort of the mainstream

8:15

Southern Baptist Consciousness for a

8:17

while he first started writing about it

8:19

about five years ago he actually

8:21

published an essay in a you know sort of

8:22

mainstream Evangelical publication about

8:24

it got a lot of push back never felt it

8:27

was the right moment to bring a

8:28

resolution to the meeting but he's had

8:31

this tucked in the back of his mind

8:33

because he has this pretty clear

8:35

conviction that IVF does not comport

8:38

with Christian anti-abortion values so

8:41

when the Alabama ruling happens and the

8:43

backlash and the broader

8:45

conversation Andrew Walker thinks you

8:47

know this is the moment so he calls his

8:50

friend and Mentor Dr Al Mohler who's the

8:53

president of the Seminary where they

8:54

both work and he says let's do it let's

8:57

start crafting a resolution for the

8:59

meeting this year and we'll see if it

9:01

gets forward we'll see if it gets

9:02

discussed we'll see if it gets approved

9:04

but we've got a strike while the iron is

9:05

hot here and did Baptist like Walker

9:09

understand that a resolution like this

9:10

would have potentially quite bad

9:12

implications for mainstream Republican

9:15

politicians like wasn't that the lesson

9:17

of Alabama yes and I I talked with both

9:20

Dr Walker and Dr mhler about this and

9:22

they both said they were completely

9:24

aware of that they didn't love it um but

9:27

they both felt that that was not their

9:30

highest priority that was not their

9:31

highest responsibility and if anything

9:34

you know Dr Mohler said this in

9:35

particular he wanted to nudge

9:38

Republicans on the issue he actually

9:39

said he wanted to do more than nudge

9:41

nudge Republicans he wanted to call them

9:42

out and so this would be a really

9:44

high-profile way to show to Republicans

9:47

look we've got thousands of mainstream

9:50

Southern Baptists in a room here who are

9:52

all expressing Collective alarm and

9:56

opposition to IVF as it's commonly

9:58

practiced okay so Baptist leaders

10:00

nevertheless put this proposal to a vote

10:02

on the floor tell us about how that went

10:05

when they put this proposal in front of

10:07

thousands of other

10:08

evangelicals it was really

10:12

dramatic we're in this cavernous

10:15

convention hall where over the course of

10:17

the last few days there's been singing

10:20

of hymns people have heard sermons

10:22

there's been prayers they've sent

10:24

missionaries out you know they've been

10:25

sort of together in the work of making

10:29

their convention what they want it to be

10:31

microphone 3A would you give us your

10:33

name your church and proceed with your

10:37

uh

10:38

discussion yes uh Daniel Taylor

10:41

messenger and then there's this

10:42

incredibly dramatic discussion and

10:45

debate about the ethics of something so

10:47

personal thank you Mr President I Rise

10:49

to speak in favor of this amendment out

10:51

of both a heart for The Unborn and for

10:53

those stricken with infertility anyone

10:55

is allowed to come to the microphone

10:58

under Southern Baptist rule

10:59

and you had two men come to the

11:02

microphone to share really personal

11:04

stories for my friends the initial steps

11:07

of IVF yielded six viable embryos four

11:10

of the embryos were implanted and two

11:13

were frozen for a time only one survived

11:16

to term their son and my godson because

11:20

of him I thank God for IVF one has a

11:25

godson born via IVF I have a son because

11:28

of IVF

11:30

I have another son 20 weeks old in my

11:32

wife's womb because of IVF the other has

11:36

one child and his wife pregnant with a

11:38

second via IVF I am for the sancy of

11:42

life and for the sancy of embryos I am

11:45

against the idea that this technology is

11:50

so wicked that it cannot be employed and

11:54

both spoke about just loving these

11:56

children and seeing the technology as a

11:58

blessing from God

12:00

um I thank the authors of the resolution

12:02

and the committee for the opportunity

12:04

for the SBC to be a voice of biblical

12:06

truth and Clarity in this pressing

12:09

cultural issue a woman came to the

12:11

microphone sort of on the other side in

12:13

addition to my living children I am the

12:16

mother of four babies that I never got

12:18

to hold two of those babies we adopted

12:21

as embryos nothing in the process of IVF

12:25

upholds the sanctity of Life there is no

12:28

way to the describe the treatment of

12:30

embryos at any point in the IVF process

12:33

as ethical or dignified the to share

12:36

that she had participated in embryo

12:38

adoption meaning that she had another

12:41

family's embryos implanted in her womb

12:44

to try to bring those pregnancies to

12:46

fruition and in this case she miscarried

12:48

both times but she had done that out of

12:50

a sense of really moral obligation to

12:53

these embryos as human life and it was

12:56

quiet I mean people are really listening

12:59

to these really personal stories and

13:02

wrestling with them this is personal for

13:05

a lot of people in that room but at the

13:08

end of all this it's time to vote on the

13:12

resolution so in the end the language

13:15

has been really carefully crafted to

13:17

kind of bring Southern Baptist Along on

13:19

this argument so it affirms that God

13:23

loves all children no matter the

13:24

circumstances of their conception it

13:26

expresses empathy for couples trying to

13:28

conceive

13:29

it says it's a good and positive thing

13:32

to want to have children to expand your

13:36

family and then it arrives at this point

13:40

of saying that IVF as it's commonly

13:43

practiced is not an ethical option for

13:46

southern Baptists in most circumstances

13:48

so this resolution comes to a vote to

13:50

the thousands of people in that room

13:52

they're all sitting in folding chairs

13:54

they raise their little orange ballots

13:56

in favor or against

13:59

and the resolution passes

14:03

overwhelmingly so this resolution

14:05

ultimately passes but how important is

14:08

it really if it's just you know an

14:10

expression of sentiment it's not

14:12

actually a directive to do something

14:14

it's hugely significant this is the

14:16

first major public statement that this

14:19

group of influential evangelicals

14:22

frankly influential Republican voters

14:25

have made on this issue and it really

14:28

sets them up on a collision course with

14:30

mainstream

14:31

[Music]

14:34

Republicans we'll be right

14:37

[Music]

14:45

back so Ruth you said that this vote

14:48

really sets evangelicals on a collision

14:50

course with mainstream Republicans what

14:53

did that look

14:54

like so mainstream Republicans in the

14:57

wake of the Alabama rule in have really

14:59

circled the wagons to try to show that

15:02

they are not only totally comfortable

15:04

with IVF but are going to go to Great

15:06

Lengths to preserve it and they see it

15:08

as pro- family they know that's how most

15:10

of their constituents view it they want

15:12

to really show that they see that as

15:15

totally separate from the conversation

15:17

about abortion and that they are going

15:18

to be the ones to preserve access to

15:21

IVF and so on the very same day this

15:24

happened in Indianapolis in Washington I

15:28

want to yield to the senator from

15:29

Alabama Senator Britt thank you so

15:32

much Senator Katie Britt of Alabama

15:35

she's an Evangelical chrisan she gets up

15:37

on the floor of the Senate and gives

15:39

this impassioned speech supporting IVF I

15:42

was proud to join my colleague from

15:44

Texas and introducing the IVF protection

15:47

act I'm she with Senator Ted Cruz of

15:50

Texas has put forward this bill that

15:52

they say is intended to protect IVF

15:55

access by blocking Medicaid funding to

15:57

states that ban it outright Democrats

15:59

say that actually would not have done

16:01

anything to fix the problem and there

16:02

are these kind of jockeying bills but

16:04

still she gets up on the senate floor

16:07

okay as a mom I know firsthand that

16:09

there's no Greater Joy in this life than

16:11

that of being a mother IVF helps

16:15

aspiring parents you know as a mom as

16:18

she puts it in defense of IVF IVF access

16:21

is fundamentally Pro family she's

16:24

wearing this really prominent cross

16:27

necklace and you know she talks about

16:30

how supporting IVF is pro- family that

16:33

that's the pro- family point of view we

16:35

all have loved ones whether they're

16:37

family members or friends who have

16:40

become parents or grandparents through

16:42

IVF and she puts out a statement the

16:45

same day with Senator Cruz and it's

16:48

signed by all of her Republican

16:50

colleagues including Josh Holly Marsha

16:52

Blackburn you know every conservative

16:55

across the Spectrum in the Senate signs

16:57

onto this report for IVF so even the

17:00

most conservative republicans in

17:02

Congress are coming out with this

17:04

position that's really at odds with

17:06

evangelicals that's right IVF is hugely

17:09

popular fertility treatments are widely

17:11

used you know including by evangelicals

17:14

most people don't even think negatively

17:15

about this stuff let alone want to ban

17:17

it so it's a real dilemma for

17:20

Republicans to watch evangelicals

17:22

potentially turn in this direction so

17:25

there's pressure from the Southern

17:26

Baptist convention on Main Street

17:29

Republicans which I have to imagine is

17:31

making Democrats pretty happy I mean I

17:33

saw President Biden out there with a

17:35

fundraising email the day that the

17:36

southern baptist voted that's right I

17:38

mean Democrats are really leaning into

17:40

Reproductive Rights right now they're

17:42

putting abortion measures on ballots in

17:44

November they know that's going to

17:46

attract their voters it's going to

17:47

attract Independence they're they're

17:48

pointing out these restrictions they're

17:50

talking about this stuff and the vote

17:53

last week from the southern baptist is

17:55

another suggestion that there's this

17:57

movement out there that doesn't just

17:59

want to regulate at 15 weeks not just at

18:01

12 weeks not just at 6 weeks but you

18:04

know all the way down to the embryo in

18:06

the lab so I think Democrats see an

18:09

opportunity here to exploit this growing

18:13

divide between evangelicals and

18:14

Republicans at least on this issue and

18:17

this is all going to be all the more

18:19

Salient ahead of a very important

18:21

presidential election I mean we're

18:22

really hurdling down the tracks toward a

18:25

big decision point for people yeah

18:27

that's exactly right the Republican

18:28

party and American evangelicals have

18:31

been in lock step really since the

18:34

1970s and you know now for Republicans

18:38

there's this question about whether or

18:40

not it's still politically advantageous

18:42

for them to follow where the

18:44

anti-abortion movement is going on this

18:46

stuff because they're pushing into

18:49

places that are really deeply unpopular

18:52

among the American population overall

18:55

and you know the anti-abortion movement

18:57

itself at this point is pretty divided

18:59

on where it's going to go next so you

19:01

know we saw the Supreme Court last week

19:03

on Thursday you know they maintained

19:05

access to the abortion pill you know

19:08

there were divisions even within the

19:09

anti-abortion movement over whether or

19:11

not to bring that case forward some

19:13

within that movement were skeptical of

19:15

it so you're seeing sort of confusion

19:17

and disagreement even internally on

19:20

where to go after the overturning of

19:22

roie Wade Ruth what about the broader

19:25

population of Evangelical Christians you

19:27

know there were 10,000 people at the

19:29

southern baptist conference voting on

19:31

this but what about everybody else where

19:34

are they on

19:36

this I think that's still a really open

19:39

question at this point you know I talked

19:41

to this young Pastor from Georgia at the

19:44

meeting who was saying you know I don't

19:47

want to go back to the people in my

19:50

church and tell them that the creation

19:53

of their children and grandchildren

19:55

comes from these immoral means and the

19:58

language of the resolution was careful

20:00

around that but it's still going to be

20:01

really hard to get that across and to

20:03

just translate it for the people in the

20:05

pews if you're an ordinary Southern

20:08

Baptist kind of reading the headlines

20:09

and even reading the text of this it's a

20:12

tough one at the same time you know

20:15

talking with Andrew Walker about this

20:17

who co-wrote the resolution you know he

20:19

acknowledged that a lot of Southern

20:21

Baptists have not really thought about

20:23

this stuff in terms of ethics and

20:25

morality and connected it to the

20:27

abortion question but when he has

20:29

one-on-one conversations with people

20:32

about the topic and sort of walks them

20:34

through basically the logic of the

20:36

resolution you know he said almost

20:39

everyone comes away from those

20:41

conversations with at the very least a

20:43

sort of skepticism and you know a level

20:46

of critical thinking around fertility

20:49

treatments that they didn't come in with

20:51

and that suggests that there's at least

20:54

sort of an openness to thinking

20:56

differently about fertility treatment

20:59

and you know the reason all this matters

21:02

is obviously evangelicals are this

21:04

hugely influential voting block they're

21:08

used to having the power to turn their

21:10

theological beliefs into policy and when

21:13

they come together you get this

21:15

political force you know the same

21:17

political force that worked for decades

21:20

over a lot of obstacles and was

21:23

eventually successful in overturning

21:26

roie Wade

21:28

now IVF is different than abortion IVF

21:32

is extremely popular including at this

21:35

point among Evangelical

21:38

Christians but if we find out that

21:40

evangelicals are persuadable on

21:43

IVF you know it doesn't just have

21:45

implications for their personal

21:47

spiritual

21:48

lives if this is the beginning of a

21:52

moral Awakening on

21:54

IVF and that's a big if it would have

21:57

real implications for the rest of the

22:02

country Ruth thank you thank

22:06

[Music]

22:17

you we'll be right

22:23

back here's what else you need to know

22:25

today on Friday the Supreme Court struck

22:29

down a ban on bump stocks which enable

22:32

semi-automatic rifles to fire at speeds

22:35

rivaling those of machine guns the

22:38

decision by a vote of 6 to3 split along

22:41

ideological lines had the effect of

22:44

erasing one of the government's rare

22:46

firearm regulations that came from a

22:49

mass shooting justi as Clarence Thomas

22:52

writing for the majority said that the

22:54

Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco firearms and

22:56

explosives had exceeded its power when

22:59

it prohibited the device by issuing a

23:01

rule that classified bum stocks as

23:04

machine

23:05

guns

23:10

and tens of thousands of demonstrators

23:13

crowded on the streets in France on

23:15

Saturday to denounce the rise of the

23:18

country's far right as the nation

23:20

prepared to vote in snap elections set

23:23

to take place later this

23:25

month French president Emanuel macron

23:28

shocked the country last week by

23:30

announcing that he was dissolving the

23:32

lower house of parliament after his

23:34

party was clobbered by farri opponents

23:37

in a vote to seat the next European

23:39

Parliament critics including some in

23:42

macron's own party warned that the

23:44

president's move to call Snap elections

23:47

opened the door to empowering the far

23:49

right in France for the first time since

23:52

World War

23:53

[Music]

23:56

II today's episode was produced uced by

23:58

Rob zipco Sydney Harper Stella tan AA

24:03

chatra and Michelle Banja it was edited

24:07

by Mark George and Lisa Chow contains

24:10

original music by Dan Powell and Marian

24:14

Lozano and was engineered by Alyssa

24:17

Moxley our theme music is by Jim

24:19

brunberg and Ben Lanser of wonderly

24:27

[Music]

24:28

that's it for the daily I'm Sabrina

24:31

Tavern see you tomorrow

24:37

[Music]

English (auto-generated)