

The Quiet Campaign Against Birth Control by Cristina Page –excerpts

At National Right to Life's conference this year, Mitt Romney set out to convince anti-abortion leaders he was their candidate. At the podium, he rattled off his qualifications. To a layman's ears, it sounded pretty standard for abortion politics. He wants to overturn Roe v. Wade. He supports teaching only abstinence to teens.

But for those trained to hear the subtleties, Mr. Romney was acknowledging something more. He implied an opposition to the birth control pill and a willingness to join in their efforts to scale back access to contraception. There are code phrases to listen for - and for those keeping score, Mr. Romney nailed each one.

One code phrase is: "I fought to define life as beginning at conception rather than at the time of implantation." The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists defines pregnancy as starting at implantation, the first moment a pregnancy can be known. Anti-abortion advocates want pregnancy to start at the unknown moment sperm and egg meet: fertilization. They'd also like you to believe, despite evidence to the contrary, that the birth control pill prevents that fertilized egg from implanting in the womb.

Mr. Romney's code, deciphered, meant, "I, like you, hope to reclassify the most commonly used forms of contraceptives as abortions." In fact, he told the crowd, he already had some practice redefining contraception: "I vetoed a so-called emergency contraception bill that gave young girls abortive drugs without prescription or parental consent."

No matter that emergency contraception has the same mode of action as the birth control pill and every other hormonal method of birth control. To the anti-abortion movement, contraception is the ultimate corruptor. And so this year, the unspoken rule for candidates seeking the support of anti-abortion groups is that they must offer proof they're anti-contraception too.

Unannounced candidate and former Sen. Fred Thompson at first denied he had been a lobbyist for the contraception advocacy group the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association. Until billing records materialized proving he worked for the group, he somehow had "no recollection of it."

.....The American public is unaware of the new wave of anti-contraception activism by opponents of abortion, which makes it much easier for politicians to appease the anti-contraception base. Take, for example, President Bush. While he has delivered some big anti-abortion victories for the religious right in the last

seven years (Supreme Court Justices John G. Roberts Jr. and Samuel A. Alito Jr., and the so-called partial-birth abortion ban), anti-contraception work has taken up more of his energy. He attempted to strip contraceptive coverage for federal employees; appointed anti-birth control leader David Hager to the FDA panel that approves and expands access to contraceptive methods; chose another contraception opponent to oversee the nation's contraceptive program for the poor; defunded international family-planning programs, and invested unprecedented sums into sex-ed programs that prohibit mention of contraception.

For now, the candidates vying for the Right to Life endorsement are doing their best to avoid directly answering mainstream voters' simple questions on the subject, such as, "Do you support couples having access to safe and effective birth control options, including emergency contraception?" Considering that even 80 percent of self-described "pro-life" voters and a majority of Republican voters strongly support contraception, it's no wonder why.

Published on Tuesday, August 21, 2007 by The Baltimore Sun

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