



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on August 23, 2012

The GOP, Todd Akin, and Abortion

On Sunday, August 19, Republican Senate candidate from Missouri, Todd Akin, embroiled himself in a world of national controversy.

During an interview with KTVI-TV in St. Louis, Akin expressed his unqualified opposition to abortion when he was asked about its moral standing in those circumstances when a woman conceives as a consequence of having been raped. “From what I understand from doctors,” he began, pregnancy is “really rare” in such a situation. “If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing [conception] down.”



Presumably, Akin opposes abortion even in the event of rape, but sought to avoid saying as much by suggesting that pregnancies rarely result from “legitimate rape.” In other words, this is an issue to which he need not speak because, ultimately, it is a non-issue.

Since then, both Democrats and Republicans have pummeled Akin for his comments. Yet interestingly, it isn’t, apparently, his unconditional rejection of abortion upon which his critics have their sights set. It is Akin’s use of language — i.e. “legitimate rape” — and biological ignorance that are their targets.

Not unsurprisingly, President Obama didn’t waste the opportunity to seize upon his political opponents. “Rape is rape,” he bluntly declared.

Cecile Richards, president of the pro-abortion Planned Parenthood Federation of America, stated: “I am constantly amazed at the lack of understanding not only of folks running for office, but in office, about women’s reproductive health.” She continued: “The statement by Mr. Akin, I think is politics at its worst, ignoring basic medicine and science in pursuit of some political ideology.”

But it isn’t just pro-abortionist ideologues like Richards who refused to spare Akin their wrath.

While speaking to CNN’s Erin Burnett, Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus said that if he were in Akin’s position, “I would step aside and let someone else run for that office.”

Akin, appearing on Sean Hannity’s radio show, said that Republican Vice-Presidential candidate Paul Ryan — with whom he co-sponsored anti-abortion legislation in the past — called him and suggested that he may want to reconsider remaining in the Missouri senate race. Mitt Romney, on the other hand, was less subtle. The presumptive GOP presidential nominee told National Review Online that Akin’s comments were “insulting,” “inexcusable and, frankly, wrong.” Romney added: “What he said is entirely without merit and he should correct it.”

Akin did seek to rectify his comments. On Mike Huckabee’s radio show, he said to his host: “Rape is never legitimate. It’s an evil act that’s committed by violent predators. I used the wrong words in the wrong way.” Akin also acknowledged that rape victims do indeed conceive.



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Still, in spite of his mea culpa, an ever increasing number of Republicans are calling for him to withdraw from the Missouri Senate race.

Writing at Townhall.com on August 22, nationally syndicated columnist and long-term Republican Ann Coulter, for example, wrote: "No Republican can ramble on about 'legitimate rape' and what happens to a woman's body after a rape when asked the de rigueur 'rape or incest' question and not step aside." Radio talk show host and columnist Dennis Prager asserts that Akin's "candidacy is no longer viable."

Karl Rove's American Crossroads super PAC and its affiliate, Crossroads GPS, has pulled 5 million dollars in funding from Akin's campaign.

So Republicans want Akin to step aside. Although the explicit focus in this episode has thus far been on Akin's misspeaking, it would appear that both Republicans and Democrats know that it has a subtext: abortion.

That the Akin controversy turns on the issue of abortion is indicated by the fact that a spokesperson for the Romney/Ryan campaign felt compelled to clarify for voters the Republican presidential ticket's stance on abortion. On Sunday evening, Amanda Henneberg stated: "Governor Romney and Congressman Ryan disagree with Mr. Akin's statement, and a Romney-Ryan administration would not oppose abortion in instances of rape."

While "a Romney-Ryan administration" may endorse abortion in cases involving rape, Congressman Paul Ryan does not. Or at least he has not in the past.

When Ryan was a congressional candidate back in 1998, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that he opposed abortion in all instances except for when the mother's life was endangered by the pregnancy. And as recently as last year, Ryan co-sponsored "the Sanctity of Human Life Act," legislation that affirmed that human life originates in "fertilization."

Ryan's — and Akin's — position on abortion is consistent with that of the Republican Party platform. As *The New American's* Jack Kenny writes: "Akin's stand [on abortion] differs...from that of the party's presidential candidate, Romney," but "the Republican National Committee's platform committee on August 21 approved a pro-life plank that makes no mention of exceptions." Kenny quotes the platform statement:

"Faithful to the 'self-evident' truths enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, we assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed."

The statement goes on to call for a "human life amendment to the Constitution" and "legislation" that establishes "that the Fourteenth Amendment's protections apply to unborn children."

It isn't just the GOP's plank with which Akin's position is consistent. Its pro-life base of both the Catholic and Evangelical Christian varieties endorse the same view.

Both the Family Research Council and the National Right to Life Committee have given Akin a 100 percent for his voting record on matters of life. Traditionalist Catholics, in keeping with Church teaching, are equally upset with the kind of response that Akin's remarks have invited from such self-avowed champions of life as his more prominent fellow Republicans.

Dr. Pia de Solenni is an ethicist and cultural analyst who received her doctorate degree in sacred theology from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. In 2001, Pope John Paul II presented her with that year's Award of the Pontifical Academies for her dissertation. On her blog, she remarks



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that “this whole situation makes all too clear just how defensive people can be when trying to defend a pro-life position. Rape has nothing to do with the human dignity of the fetus. Both the fetus and the mother deserve much better than rape, but neither of their lives is worth any less insofar as they are victims.”

Akin may imperil Republicans’ chances of regaining the Senate. Yet their reaction to Akin may imperil their credibility when they claim to be “pro-life.”

Photo: In this Aug. 16, 2012 photograph, Rep. Todd Akin (R-Mo.) and his wife Lulli, talk with reporters while attending the Governor’s Ham Breakfast at the Missouri State Fair in Sedalia ,

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