



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on August 24, 2012

Todd Akin and the Possible Fall Out for Republicans and Democrats

On August 19, Missouri Senate candidate Todd Akin inadvertently thrust the perennial issue of abortion into the center of this election season.

The staunchly pro-life Akin was then posed with the same challenge with which all opponents of abortion have had to reckon at some time or another: Is abortion morally permissible in the instance of rape? It was then that he drew what has since become an infamous distinction between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” forms of rape as he tried to circumvent the question by insinuating that pregnancy rarely occurs when intercourse is non-consensual.



Throughout the week, Akin has been pummeled by Democrats and Republicans — but more so by the latter. From Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney to GOP strategist Karl Rove, from nationally syndicated columnist Ann Coulter to radio and television host Sean Hannity, the chorus of Republican voices calling for Akin to withdraw from the Senate race has reached a deafening pitch.

Although Democrats seem to believe that they have a winning issue here, it is questionable whether either Democrats or Republicans stand to gain much from having abortion at the center of national attention. And it is more than a bit possible that they both have much to lose from this turn of events.

The Republican Party styles itself as being the party of “life.” Indeed, its official plank includes a statement that affirms “the sanctity of human life” of “the unborn child” and its “fundamental individual right to life,” a right that “cannot be infringed.”

Like Akin, in other words, the GOP does not allow exceptions for abortion in those instances when pregnancy results as a consequence of rape.

However, while the Republican Party platform is consistent with Akin’s views, it is not consistent with that of its aspiring titular head — Mitt Romney. Romney campaign spokesperson Amanda Henneberg was quick to assure the media and the electorate that “a Romney/Ryan administration would not oppose abortion in instances of rape.”

This is problematic for both Romney and his running mate, Paul Ryan.

Romney is already seen by the base of his party, and its culturally conservative constituency particularly, as a “flip flopper.” This perception is not altogether unwarranted. While running for a senate seat in Massachusetts, Romney insisted that he supported a woman’s right to elect for an abortion. Many years later, in 2008, when he decided to cast his first bid for the presidency, he declared that he was now pro-life. It isn’t that Romney supposedly changed his mind on this issue that troubles voters. It is the politically convenient timing of his alleged conversion that concerns them.



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Now, as Akin's popularity diminishes precipitously, Romney swears that while he is opposed to abortion, the destruction of the unborn is permissible as long as it is the product of rape.

Matters are even more challenging for Paul Ryan. Ryan has worked on anti-abortion legislation with Akin in the past, and has articulated a position on abortion that is indistinguishable from that held by Akin. Ryan once said that the only time that he is willing to allow for an exception to abortion is when the mother's life is endangered.

In other words, abortion is not, according to Ryan, permissible in the case of rape.

But it isn't just Republicans who should be having a difficult time discussing this issue at this time. Democrats also risk harming themselves.

Polls consistently show that the majority of Americans oppose abortion. Yet the Democratic Party generally, and Barack Obama specifically, endorse it.

Obama is perhaps the most ardently pro-abortion politician that has ever been. And as far as presidents are concerned, his views can only be characterized as "extreme." In fact, this is exactly how *National Review* writer Rich Lowry describes Obama in connection to this issue.

Lowry reminds us that while in the Illinois legislature, Obama "opposed the 'Born-Alive Infants Protection Act.'" Yet he opposed it not once, but on three separate occasions. This piece of legislation, in affirming the personhood of babies born after botched abortions, required doctors to supply them with medical care.

When Obama's position on this bill was raised during the 2008 election season, then Senator Obama made it appear that he voted against it simply and solely because it was unnecessary. There were already similar protections for such babies on the books. As Lowry correctly observes though, this isn't exactly true.

"The bill was supposedly redundant," Lowry remarked. "Except it wasn't. Protections for infants who survived abortions were shot through with loopholes, which is why the bill was offered in the first place. (Abortion doctors were leaving infants to die without any care.)."

Lowry continues: "About a year after his final vote against the bill, Obama gave his famous 2004 Democratic convention speech extolling post-partisan moderation. But he couldn't even bring himself to protect infants brutalized and utterly alone in some medical facility taking what might be only a few fragile breaths on this Earth."

Lowry then reinforces the impression that Obama is an extremist on all matters pertaining to abortion when he mentions that "the federal version of the bill that he opposed in Illinois passed the U.S. Senate unanimously."

Lowry also alludes to a proposed ban on partial-birth abortion that Obama opposed while in Illinois. The federal version of the bill, however, passed the House and Senate easily. President George W. Bush signed it into law. When the Supreme Court upheld it, U.S. Senator Obama repudiated its decision.

What the *National Review* claims about Obama on abortion is a matter of public record. Perhaps most telling is the promise that Obama made in 2007 to the Planned Parenthood Action Fund that upon his election to the presidency, he wouldn't spare a moment in signing the Freedom of Choice Act. Lowry states: "The act would enshrine in federal law a right to abortion more far-reaching than in *Roe v. Wade* and eliminate basically all federal and state-level restrictions on abortion."



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Both Republicans and Democrats may want to rethink whether it is in their best interests to continue piling on Todd Akin.

Photo of Rep. Todd Akin (R-Mo.): AP Images



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