

## **WHEN CONSTITUENCIES COLLIDE: ABORTION, FAITH OUTREACH AND THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the Democratic turn towards the evangelical community, in particular the running of pro-life candidates in order to get the religious vote. The American evangelical community has undergone significant changes in recent years. One notable example has been the adoption of environmental stewardship, which many evangelicals increasingly view as a matter of biblical importance. In an effort to close what many have dubbed the ‘God Gap’, Democrats have hoped to capitalize on these recent religious developments by reaching out the evangelical community as never before. By itself, however, faith outreach can only go so far. Indeed, the Democrats historic support of abortion rights keeps it at odds with the broader evangelical community. To minimize this, the party has shown a propensity for running pro-life candidates in socially conservative seats. And while such a strategy has proved fruitful for Democrats, it has nevertheless angered many party faithful who view such a move as an abandonment of core political principles and one which risks the party’s historic support of abortion rights. This paper analyses the many facets of this changing political debate and explores the politics of abortion from many angles. Although a shift in Democrat strategy is noted, ultimately it is argued that under current political conditions abortion rights are actually better protected despite the fact that many House Democrats are themselves ‘pro-life’.

By the summer of 2005, the Republican Party, emboldened by impressive political victories the year before, had begun losing the trust and confidence of the American people. Much of this erosion in political support can be directly attributed to the federal government’s botched handling of the Hurricane Katrina relief effort, though not all. Indeed, by 2005 public attitudes had begun souring over the war in Iraq and the growing fiscal deficit. Hoping to capitalize on this rare political opportunity, House Democrats turned to Illinois Congressman Rahm Emanuel to lead the party to victory in the 2006 midterm elections. Emanuel, who had

previously served as a senior aide to former President Bill Clinton, knew that Democrats were likely to gain seats in New England and the rest of the Northeast. Yet he also knew that if the party hoped to wrestle the Speakership away from House Republicans any path to victory required winning Republican held seats throughout the Mid and Intermountain West. In order to achieve this, however, Emmanuel needed candidates capable of running against the failures of the Republican Party, but who at the same time could avoid the party's liberal baggage.<sup>1</sup> In essence, what Emmanuel needed were moderate to liberal Republicans willing to put a (D) in front of their name.

Among candidates handpicked by Emanuel was a little known sheriff from Indiana's Vanderburgh County named Brad Ellsworth. In selecting Ellsworth, Emanuel was taking a calculated risk as Ellsworth was largely a political novice with no prior legislative experience and thus prone to mistakes and gaffes. What Emanuel was banking on, however, was that Ellsworth conservative social philosophy (he is a pro-gun, pro-life Catholic) would ultimately resonate with the voters of Indiana's eighth, heavily religious, congressional district. It was a gamble that paid off: not only was Ellsworth the first of 30 Democratic challengers who successfully defeated their Republican opponents on election night, but he did so by the largest margin of any freshmen elected to Congress that year by defeating six-term Republican incumbent John Hostettler, 61 to 39 percent.

In many respects, the Ellsworth candidacy and victory has become symbolic of the aggressive and largely populist campaigning approach Democrats have adopted following their political losses of 2004. It is a strategy that, in addition to running socially conservative candidates in socially conservative districts and states, also seeks to make headway among constituencies long supportive of the Republican Party. One of the most ambitious undertakings of the Democratic Party has been an extensive faith outreach effort aimed at closing the so-called 'God Gap' by appealing to more moderate and younger evangelical Christians. These efforts have been greatly aided by a recent theological shift within the evangelical community, whereby many evangelicals have adopted environmental protection as a matter of religious and biblical importance. In an attempt to court the evangelical voter, Democrats have shown themselves willing to run candidates whose stances on core issues are in direct conflict with

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<sup>1</sup> Antle, W. James, III. "The Brad Ellsworth Test." *The American Spectator*, Found online at: <<http://spectator.org/archives/2010/04/02/the-brad-ellsworth-test>> (accessed September 1, 2010).

the party's liberal political base. And while this strategy has proven successful in winning elections, it has nevertheless been the source of growing tension and Democratic Party infighting. The fear for many Democrats is that by running socially conservative candidates such as Brad Ellsworth, the party not only angers its base of liberal feminist voters, but also risks its historic support of reproductive rights. In examining the politics of abortion from various political perspectives, this paper provides a better understanding of how recent faith outreach efforts by Democrats are indeed changing abortion politics.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First it sets the scene for the discussion by giving a brief overview of the historical alignment of Democrat and liberal pro-choice politics. Next it details the changing dynamics of evangelical politics. It is shown that environmental issues have become more salient within the evangelical community, and that this has resulted in gains for Democrats. However, it is shown that abortion rights remain a political sticking point on both the Republican right and Democratic left. This paper then addresses predictions that recruiting more socially conservative Democrat candidates will lead to the abandonment of the party's pro-choice stance. Formally, it tests the hypothesis that running politically viable pro-life Democrats will lead to an erosion of legislative support for pro-choice issues. To do so the paper draws upon statistical data taken from the National Right to Life Committee and assesses the voting records of all congressional Democrats serving in the United States House of Representative from the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress to the present day. This data shows that despite the fact that the Democratic Party views the running of pro-life candidates as a viable path to political victory, and that a number of these pro-life candidates are now members of the Democratic House caucus, voting records indicate that there has actually been measurable gains in favour of abortion rights. In the final analysis it is argued that counter to fears of a potential conservative turn on abortion issues, Democrats seem to have mitigated this risk, as it is demonstrated how the selection of attractive candidates is balanced through agenda setting practices that keep divisive votes on abortion at bay.

### ***Abortion Politics and the Democratic Base***

In May of 1972, a proposal was put before the democratically controlled Connecticut state legislature, which if passed would have banned abortions except in cases where the mother's life was endangered. The legislation, which had the support of John Bailey, who was by then

retired from the national scene and had returned to his home state to run party politics, was ultimately defeated in what went down as a political milestone in American politics.<sup>2</sup> The reason for the bills defeat, however, had little to do with internal Connecticut state politics. Instead it should be viewed as a direct outcome of the McGovern Commission.

The McGovern Commission, also known as the McGovern-Fraser Commission (as it would eventually be chaired by Senator George McGovern and Congressman Donald Fraser) was a committee of 28 members handpicked by former Democratic National Committee Chairman, and Oklahoma Senator, Fred Harris. It was created in response to the violence and chaos of the 1968 Democrat National Convention in Chicago.<sup>3</sup> Concerned primarily with broadening political participation and representing the views of minorities and other underrepresented constituencies within the Democratic Party, the McGovern Commission made significant changes to the way in which convention delegates were chosen, and ultimately, how candidates were nominated. In this respect, significant political powers were stripped from the likes of Chicago Mayor Robert Daley and former party chairman John Bailey. As a result of changes, feminists were greatly empowered and thus emerged as a leading political force within the Democratic Party. By 1976, Women's groups had successfully outmanoeuvred Carter's presidential campaign when, to the campaigns displeasure, a plank was inserted into the party's political platform opposing a constitutional amendment overturning *Roe v. Wade*.<sup>4</sup>

Since the adoption of a pro-choice stance, women's groups and the abortion rights lobby have continued to grow more influential within the Democratic Party. Among the largest and most recognizable of these organizations are Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which enjoys an operating budget of more than a billion dollars annually,<sup>5</sup> NARAL Pro-Choice

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<sup>2</sup> Stricherz, Mark. 2007. "Secular Feminism's Path to Power." *First Things*. Found online at: <<http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2007/11/secular-feminisms-path-to-powe>> (accessed September 2, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> 1968 was a tumultuous year for Democrats. Following the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy, Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy emerged as the favored candidate among the left. Yet at that year's National Convention in Chicago, party bosses passed over McCarthy and instead nominated sitting Vice-President, Hubert Humphrey, who had not run in a single primary, as the party's nominee for president. Disgusted by the nominating process, many delegates and other assembled Democrats took to the streets in anger and violence. For further reading on the events of the 1968 Democratic National Convention, see; Kurlansky, Mark. 2005. *1968: The Year that Rocked the World*. New York: Random House.

<sup>4</sup> Although Carter was supportive of abortion rights in 1976, he was, like any smart politician, hoping to avoid a projected public debate on the matter. For this reason, his campaign lobbied against the inclusion of any abortion plank in party's political platform. For further information, see Stricherz, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Planned Parenthood Federation of America 2006-2007 annual report. Found online at: <[http://www.plannedparenthood.org/files/AR\\_2007\\_vFinal.pdf](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/files/AR_2007_vFinal.pdf)> (accessed September 9, 2010).

America, which Forbes Magazine ranks as one of the ten most effective advocacy groups in America and ranked by the National Journal as the second most successful political organization of 2008,<sup>6</sup> the National Organization of Women (NOW), which boasts a membership of more than half a million, and Emily's List, which when it began in 1985 as a political action committee (PAC), its primary focus was on providing 'seed' money to progressive pro-choice women candidates, but whose political operation has, according to author Jamie Pimlott: "morphed into a multi-pronged influence organization that functions as a PAC, an interest group, a party adjunct, and a campaign organization."<sup>7</sup> As Pimlott concludes, there are today "few political theatres where Emily's List has not become a major player."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, since 2001, the number of registered Democrats self-identifying as 'pro-choice' has consistently remained between 58 percent and 61 percent of the party, while the number of Democrats identifying as 'pro-life' rarely tops more than a third.<sup>9</sup> Given these numbers, it is safe to say that the protection of abortion rights remains a key prerogative within the Democratic Party.

### ***The Changing Dynamics of the Evangelical Vote***

On May 25, 2010, the Reverend Mitch Hescox, President and CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), in partnership with Christians for the Mountains and Renewal: Students Caring for Creation completed an 18 day spiritual pilgrimage when he arrived in Washington D.C. for the National Creation Care Day of Prayer. Throughout his 18 day journey, Hescox, accompanied by 40 fellow evangelists, successfully navigated his way by foot over more than 300 miles of mountainous Appalachian terrain, stopping daily to spread a message of environmental stewardship at local schools and with church congregations.<sup>10</sup> A month prior to Hescox's pilgrimage, the Florida based Northland megachurch, home to some 16,000 worshippers, "hosted the first ever global simulcast for a

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<sup>6</sup> NARAL: Pro-Choice America, found online at: <<http://www.naral.org/donate/>> (accessed September 9, 2010). This was based on its support for political candidates.

<sup>7</sup> Pimlott, Jamie Pamela. 2010. *Women and the Democratic Party: The Evolution of Emily's List*. Amherst, New York: Cambria Press; pg. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Saad, Lydia. 2009. "More American's 'Pro-Life' than 'Pro-Choice' for First Time." *Gallup*. Found online at: <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/118399/more-americans-pro-life-than-pro-choice-first-time.aspx>> (accessed September 9, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Blessed Earth. 2010. "National Day of Prayer for Creation Care". Found online at: <<http://www.blessedearth.org/blogs/news/evangelicalministrieshost300milecreationcarewalk.html>> (accessed May 28, 2010).

church-based creation care event.”<sup>11</sup> This event was itself attended by more than 60,000 individuals from more than 30 countries around the world. According to Joel C. Hunter, the senior pastor at Northland, the primary focus was to “recast the environmental movement into its proper perspective as a biblical issue that Christians should care about.”<sup>12</sup> This illustrates growing embracement of environmental protection on the behalf of American evangelical Christians.<sup>13</sup> And it is precisely of the embracement of environmental stewardship that Democrats are counting on as they continue their faith outreach efforts.

The fact that American evangelicals have begun registering environmental issues on their social radar has not been missed by political operatives in Washington and elsewhere around the country. For their part, many Democrats, though by no means all, have taken a favorable view of this theological shift, as between the two major political parties, Democrats stand the most to gain. This emergence of evangelical environmentalism provides Democrats with an important, vote worthy issue on which they and the evangelical community are in considerable agreement. By contrast, however, the Republican environmental image is dominated by alignment with the oil and coal industries as well as other corporate polluters. This image, whether deserved or not, is one which does not sit well for many in the creation care camp and which also appears to be costing Republicans at the ballot box.<sup>14</sup> The hope for Democrats is that by talking with evangelical Christians about matters of environmental protection (as well as other selected issues such as poverty and human trafficking), Democrats can begin to close the ‘God Gap’, a term used to describe the party’s inability to capture the religiously devout voter.

Among Democrats who see the most potential in dialoging with the evangelical community is Amy Sullivan, a contributing editor at Time Magazine and former aide to the now retired Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle. As early as 2003, Sullivan was arguing that the reluctance of many Democrats to speak openly about their faith was costing them

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<sup>11</sup> Vu, Michelle A. 2010. “U.S. evangelicals gather to pray for creation”. *Christian Post*. Found online at: < <http://au.christiantoday.com/article/us-evangelicals-gather-to-pray-for-creation-care/8319.htm>> (accessed May 28, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Vu, Michelle A. 2010. “Florida Megachurch to Host Largest Creation Care Event”. *Christian Post*. Found online at: < <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20100421/fla-megachurch-to-host-largest-creation-care-event/index.html>> (accessed June 1, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> See for instance; Boerl, Christopher Wayne Frazier-Crawford. 2010. “American Evangelical Christians and the Politics of Climate Change.” *St. Anthony’s International Review*, 5(2); pgs. 147-163.

<sup>14</sup> Frazier-Crawford-Boerl, Christopher W. and Chris Perkins. 2010. “The political pluralisation of American evangelicals: How old media built a movement and why the Internet is poised to change it.” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 10(4), pgs. 1-13.

significantly at the polls. As she quite accurately predicted prior to the 2004 election, should the Democratic presidential nominee fail to connect with voters on a religious level (as Kerry has routinely been criticized for), then the party would likely lose that contest. As Sullivan notes:

“A president who can talk about his personal faith and explain how it connects to his policy initiatives enjoys both the tactical advantage of attracting the “swing faithful” and the moral stature to excite and inspire all those, religious or not, who are already predisposed to support him on the issues. To become America's majority party again, the Democrats will have to get religion.”<sup>15</sup>

During the 2008 presidential election, both Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama understood this message well and wisely committed considerable time and money reaching out to religious voters. Once Obama captured his party's nomination, his campaign continued its heavy courtship of religious voters. As a result Obama succeeded in reversing more than a decade's worth of sliding evangelical support for Democratic presidential nominees, when on election night he captured the support of 26 percent of white evangelical voters, a 5 point gain over Kerry's anaemic 2004 showing.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, this reversal likely played a contributing factor in many congressional campaigns. To say, however, that Democrats have found a new constituency in evangelical voters may be stretching the facts a bit far. To be certain, there appears to be much hope and optimism within the Democratic Party that Democrats could expand upon the success of 2006 and 2008 and continue to make inroads to what has long been a pillar of Republican support. Yet such an outcome remains anything but certain and has served as a point of considerable debate among Republicans.

For Republican operative ‘Josh Brown’, the creation care movement is one that Republicans should view with some trepidation, as he believes creation care has some political pull as the environment is an issue that “a lot of evangelicals can support.”<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, however, Brown feels that environmental concerns will fail to “override considerations such as abortion and gay marriage[,]”<sup>18</sup> thus safely and reliably delivering the evangelical camp into

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<sup>15</sup> Sullivan, Amy. 2003. “Do the Democrats have a prayer?” *The Washington Monthly*. Found online at: <<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2003/0306.sullivan.html>> (accessed July 20, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. “How the Faithful Voted.” Found online at: <<http://pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/How-the-Faithful-Voted.aspx>> (accessed September 10, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Josh Brown on creation care, abortion, and American politics, July 15, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

GOP hands. By contrast, however, Idaho Republican, Linda Smith, herself a graduate from the evangelical Wheaton College, views the rising creation care tide with more alarm. For Smith the knowledge that Democrats are now courting evangelical voters is “troubling” as she believes that the values of the Democratic Party are out of sync with evangelical Christianity. Yet Smith’s concedes that recent Democratic faith outreach efforts could succeed with even greater effect. As Smith explains:

“The one weakness with the evangelical movement is their lack of accountability and that is where I see the DNC being successful. What I mean by that is that in the evangelical movement, one may say, ‘God told me such and such[,]’ [and] as long as the principle is found in scripture, an evangelical friend or congregation would go right along and give an, ‘Amen.’”<sup>19</sup>

Providing a different take on the matter is the Reverend Justin McMurdie, a self-identified evangelical preacher, who enters this debate not from professional politics, but rather from the Christian ministry. For McMurdie, who leads a flourishing Church of Christ congregation in rural Oregon, there is little doubt that today’s younger evangelicals are more moderate on many social and political issues compared to their parents and grandparents. This, McMurdie acknowledges, could prove problematic for Republicans in the future (if it has not done so already), yet the real political crisis McMurdie sees facing the Republican Party is not the moderation of political and social values among a newer generation of potential supporters, but rather the loss of evangelical enthusiasm for the party and diminishing sense of political optimism. Sharing his views on the matter, McMurdie notes:

“I used to probably think that here was being a Christian and right below that here’s being a Republican, and that they went hand-in-hand, but now I wouldn’t say that at all. I wouldn’t say I shifted to a Democrat or a liberal perspective, I’m just disillusioned with the political process in general. So I’m not aligning myself with the Republicans or the Religious Right, but I’m also not aligning myself with Democrats and the left agenda either.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with ‘Linda Smith’ on creation care, abortion and the evangelical community, July 13, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Justin McMurdie on creation care, Emergent Village and the future of the evangelical community, May 23, 2009.



When pressed what it was about the Democrats that McMurdie found objectionable abortion and gay rights surfaced. In general, McMurdie remains convinced that most evangelicals are “always going to stand strongly against abortion.”<sup>21</sup> And so long as the Democratic Party remains supportive of abortion rights, then most Democratic candidates are going to have a difficult time appealing to evangelical voters.

Yet if evangelicals have grown frustrated by the failures of Republicans in Washington and remain opposed to many of the social and cultural values of the Democratic Party; where does that leave the evangelical vote? For McMurdie, the question is a tough one, but ultimately, he feels evangelicals may be entering a phase of political disengagement and inward retreat:

“I look into the gospel and I look into the New Testament and I see Paul and the other early Christians and I don’t see them out there in the Roman Empire seeking to do a lot of political activity. They pretty much sought to seek a life that was characterized by love and care for the poor and they stood in stark contrast to culture. It wasn’t until the third and fourth century when Constantine made it the official religion of the empire that it became political expedient to be a Christian. I think we are going away from [the] politicized and I’m not sure that’s a bad thing, but I’m not sure it’s a good thing either.”<sup>22</sup>

Whether good or not, significant political demobilization on the part of evangelical Christians will inevitably harm the electoral prospects of the Republican Party, a point with which Barrett Duke, Vice-President of the Ethics and Liberty Commission, an organization which serves as the political arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, finds both deeply worrisome and anti-biblical. As Duke states:

“I’m sure that now as always there are Christians who believe that the church should not engage in the political process and there are people today who are raising those concerns. They should feel free to follow the Lord however they choose and they should feel free to express their concerns and voice their message and call an alarm to the broader church if they choose to do that, but it doesn’t mean that everyone else who is engaging in the political process is

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

out of God's will. God certainly has called his prophets in the past to engage with Kings, so it would be inappropriate for Christians to say that Christians shouldn't speak to power and engage in the political process. We'd have to eliminate most of the pages out of the Bible in order to actually make that case from the full teaching of scripture."<sup>23</sup>

Over the years, many have speculated and warned that evangelicals might not turn out on election night. To date this event has not happened. Should it ever, however, the result would likely be ruinous for the GOP. As it stands, Democrats are committed to contesting the evangelical vote. This commitment has been reflected in the party's willingness to run high profile conservative candidates, such as the pro-life Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey and Ohio Governor Ted Strickland, an ordained United Methodist Minister. To some political spectators, nominating candidates such as Strickland and Casey is a shrewd political move on the part of Democrats, while others question the logic of running them. Yet for many evangelicals, the electoral viability of the likes of Casey and other conservative Democrats, only help to advance conservative Christian values. Such candidates, as the argument goes, help to move the Democrat Party away from the party of 'amnesty, abortion and acid'. In such instances, while Republican candidates might suffer at the hands of socially conservative Democrats, social conservatism does not.<sup>24</sup>

### ***The Pro-Life Politics of Being an Environmentalist***

As the previous sections have shown, the political dynamics of the American evangelical are experiencing considerable flux. Although Democrats hope to capitalize on what some are arguing is growing moderation on the part of younger evangelicals, the party's ongoing support of abortion rights keeps it at odds with the vast majority of evangelicals, both young and old alike.<sup>25</sup> Running pro-life Democrats, particularly candidates with solid

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Barrett Duke on creation care, Emergent Village and the future of the evangelical community, May 17, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Kuruvila, Matthai Chakko. 2006. "Some Evangelical Christians Reconsider Their Faith in GOP." *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Found online at: <<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines06/1113-02.htm>> (accessed August 12, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> In a recent 2010 poll, the Barna Group found that 78 percent of American evangelicals believe that abortion should be illegal in all or nearly all cases. When respondents were divided by age, this same Barna poll found no discernable difference between younger and older evangelicals. These findings mirror those of the Pew Forum, which also found broad opposition to abortion among white evangelical Christians, though this poll indicated some softening on the importance with which all voters ascribe the issue. For further information refer to: Barna. 2010. "New Barna Study Explore Current Views on Abortion." *The Barna Group*. Found

environmental credentials, will likely aide the party in appealing to a new generation of evangelical voters, as this more nuanced approach better reflects the emerging values of younger evangelicals. However, as will be seen shortly, such a strategy is not without its risks.

For pro-choice Democrats who represent districts with a significant evangelical population, Democrats such as Representative Kurt Schrader (OR-5), the widely accepted strategy of dealing with the abortion issue is to simply pretend one does not exist. Yet attempts to ignore questions of abortion are akin to ignoring the proverbial elephant in the room, as for many evangelicals the issue of valuing life and the issue of valuing the environment are one in the same. As Restoring Eden (a leading creation care organizations) argue:

“As political and social conservatives, evangelicals tend to lump protection of the environment together with the lack of protection for children in the womb; we often have the irrational idea that abortion-rights advocacy and the efforts to rescue stranded animals or preserve endangered non-human species are parallel and equal hallmarks of “liberal” thought. Most fail to see how illogical it is to save the babies and then care less about the health and integrity of the environment upon which their survival depends. We typically fail to see that opposing abortion and supporting creation care are both “pro-life” positions.”<sup>26</sup>

For groups such as Restoring Eden, as well as for many others in the creation care camp, the issue of valuing life is more complicated than simply protecting the ‘unborn.’ Instead, being pro-life for many evangelical environmentalists is a matter of spiritual interconnectedness and dutiful servitude for the entirety of life. For the evangelical environmentalist, it makes no sense to promote the values of a pro-life agenda, if the life one is fighting to bring into this world is only to be subjected to cancer causing chemicals and other life-threatening pollutants

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online at: <<http://www.barna.org/culture-articles/394-new-barna-study-explores-current-views-on-abortion->>> (accessed September 9, 2010); and The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. 2009. “Support for Abortion Slips: Issue Ranks Lower on the Agenda.” Found online at: <<http://pewforum.org/Abortion/Support-for-Abortion-Slips%282%29.aspx>> (accessed September 11, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Ohlman, Dean. “21 Reasons That Evangelicals ‘Don’t’ Get Creation Care.” *Restoring Eden*. Found Online at: <<http://restoringeden.org/resources/Ohlman/21Reasons>> (accessed September 11, 2010).

once born. It is for this reason that Pastor Hunter views environmental issues so important for the pro-life movement. As Hunter notes:

“In Genesis 2:15, God gives a simple command to mankind about the earth: ‘Cultivate it and keep it.’ That is to say, we must be concerned not only with production, but also with the protection of God’s creation. Dominion is never given for the purpose of exploitation. Christians, of all people, should be thankful enough for the grace of God and His immeasurable gifts that we would not want to pollute such gifts.”<sup>27</sup>

For Hunter, the important questions evangelicals must bear in mind on election day are: “‘How does this candidate or bill seek to balance production with protection,’” and “‘how can I be a part of preserving the earth for the generations to come?’”<sup>28</sup> For pro-life Democratic candidates, questions such as these would undoubtedly be welcomed, as they would inevitably attract even larger electoral support. The problem, however, is that while pro-life congressional Democrats enjoy a sizable caucus in the United States House of Representatives, they remain a caucus at odds with many of the party faithful. As Democrats move forward with a political strategy encouraging pro-life candidates to run in more socially conservative districts, tensions and frustrations will inevitably grow among many women’s groups and other liberal Democrats who view the party’s historic support of abortion rights as a sacred political value. As such, Democrats can either learn to accommodate the complexities of a larger, more diversified political constituency (which should allow them to win more elections), or they can look to ‘purify’ their party ideologically, which will most certainly reduce their political appeal.

### ***Can There Be An Abortion Compromise?***

While recent research and polling data indicates that younger evangelicals are more than twice as likely as their parents to support gay marriage and other forms of gay rights, and are more inclined than their parents to support government sponsored anti-poverty programs and other social justice related measures, on the question of abortion, younger evangelicals

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<sup>27</sup> Hunter, Joel C. 2008. “Completely Pro-Life.” Found online at: < <http://completelyprolife.com/>> (accessed September 11, 2010). See also, Hunter, Joel C. 2008. *A New Kind of Conservative*. Ventura, California: Regal Books.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

remain as committed to pro-life values as any generation before them.<sup>29</sup> This reality poses significant political challenges for the Democratic Party as they continue to press forward with their evangelical outreach. To bridge this political divide, Democrats are banking on the party's ability to find common ground with evangelical Christians. As Hillary Clinton's former faith outreach director Burns Strider sees it, "nobody loves or wants abortion,"<sup>30</sup> and it is for this reason why Strider is convinced that Democrats and evangelicals will eventually find "common ground policies" which will work to "reduce the number of abortions in the county."<sup>31</sup> Sex education is one area where Strider sees ground being made, as well as a possible conscience clause that would allow doctors the option of opting out of abortion procedures and would allow pharmacists the right to refuse filling 'morning after' prescriptions. Yet in the United States, where the politics of abortion are as polarizing as ever, it is difficult to see how such compromises will appease everyone. If anything, recent events demonstrate the opposite is often the case. For instance, when Barack Obama asked Rick Warren to give the invocation at his presidential inauguration, a move which was supposed to be seen as an extension of the olive branch to the evangelical community, many on the left were offended that the President would give such an honor to a pro-life, anti-gay rights pastor. At the same time, those on the right were similarly dismayed when Warren accepted such an accolade from a decidedly pro-choice, pro-gay rights president.<sup>32</sup> And this was only a cosmetic issue!

When, for instance, abortion compromises deal specifically with policy matters, public anger is usually much more visceral. For example, in an effort to reach the 60 votes needed to end debate on healthcare reform, the United States Senate considered several measures that would limit insurance coverage for abortion. Ultimately, these measures failed to win broad public support as instead of focusing on what was being protected by these compromises, each side of the abortion debate instead chose to focus on what they were losing. When, for instance,

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<sup>29</sup> Refer to Barna 2010 and Pew 2009; see also Chamberlain, Pam. 2009. "Younger Evangelicals: Where will they take the Christian Right." *The Public Eye Magazine*, 24(1), found online at: <<http://www.publiceye.org/magazine/v24n1/younger-evangelicals-where-wil-whey.html>> (accessed September 2, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Burns Strider on faith outreach and the Democratic Party, July 23, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Schaeffer, Frank. 2008. "Obama was right to pick Warren." *The Huffington Post*. Found Online at: <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-schaeffer/obama-was-right-to-pick-w\\_b\\_152330.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-schaeffer/obama-was-right-to-pick-w_b_152330.html)> (accessed August 5, 2010). See also Brody, David. 2008. "Pro-Lifers Rip Rick Warren on Obama Invocation." *CBN News*. Found online at: < <http://blogs.cbn.com/thebrodyfile/archive/2008/12/18/pro-lifers-rip-rick-warren-on-obama-invocation.aspx>> (accessed August 5, 2010).

the Senate moved to provide two separate governments subsidized insurance schemes, one with an abortion option and the other without it, groups such as Planned Parenthood, the National Organization for Women (NOW) and NARAL come out in strong opposition this would fail to provide abortion coverage to all women in the country. On this same proposal, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops was also in opposition, though for decidedly different reasons. As the Bishops stated, “this bill should not be supported in its current form because it would allow federal money to go to health insurance plans that cover elective abortions[,]” a sentiment with which the National Right to Life Committee similarly praised.<sup>33</sup>

Given the entrenched interests surrounding abortion the probability that either side will simply accept political compromises in the name of finding common ground seems next to nil. Moreover, as seen throughout the 2010 midterm elections, politicians that are decided by party activists to be too moderate on any number of political issues (abortion included), run the very real risk of losing their party’s nomination. This fact was famously driven home in the case of Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski. As National Public Radio’s Ron Elving summarized:

“Which kind of Alaska Republican was most motivated for this primary? The answer appears to be the populist, evangelical, anti-abortion Republicans who are likely to identify with the movement known as the Tea Party.

“Murkowski had a vulnerability within her own party because she was a supporter of abortion rights in some cases. While abortion views are divided in Alaska as elsewhere, opposition to abortion is more concentrated in the Republican Party. And this week’s ballot featured a voter measure on requiring parental notification prior to an abortion for a minor. Murkowski endorsed the measure, but the anti-abortion activists who came out to vote for it may well have preferred Miller’s anti-abortion credentials overall.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Pear, Robert. 2009. “Negotiating to 60 Votes, Compromise by Compromise.” *The New York Times*. Found online at: < [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/20/health/policy/20care.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/20/health/policy/20care.html?_r=1)> (accessed August 5, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Elving, Ron. 2010. “Watching Washington.” *National Public Radio*. Transcript available online at: <<http://www.npr.org/blogs/watchingwashington/2010/08/26/129444803/is-alaska-really-the-anti-universe-of-politics>> (accessed September 2, 2010).

Given losses such as Murkowski and others, it is difficult to see how America's current political climate will reward anything but further ideological polarization. Should such polarization indeed come to fruition, political compromises on abortion, while unlikely today, will be nothing short of fanciful in the future.

### ***Faith Outreach and Party Tensions***

As discussed above, although Democrats and evangelicals are increasingly finding common ground on a growing list of issues (the environment being only one example), there remains considerable differences between the evangelical community and one of the Democrats most reliable constituencies: women's groups. As Jim Wallis notes:

“There are literally millions of votes at stake...Virtually everywhere I go, I encounter moderate and progressive Christians who find it painfully difficult to vote Democrat given the party's rigid ideological stance on this critical moral issue, a stance they regard as ‘pro-abortion.’ Except for this major and, in some cases, insurmountable obstacle, these voters would be casting Democratic ballots.”<sup>35</sup>

As we have seen, Democrats have shown themselves willing to anger women's groups by running pro-life Democrats in districts and states where a more liberal candidate would likely loose. Such a move, though political wise, is not without its risk, particularly if a more moderate candidate dampens turnout among the Democratic base or fails to drive fundraising. Perhaps, more importantly, by running pro-life candidates the Democratic Party faces the very real prospects of raising in-party tensions, while also driving the party to the political right. When asked about the possible political ramifications of Democratic faith outreach efforts pertaining specifically to the creation of tensions between the Democrat Party and women's groups Strider had this to say:

“There's been friction created there, and right now it requires daily work. What I'm learning and what I'm working on is that there are good relationships between some of the women's group leaders and some of the progressive faith group leaders, so there can continue to be dialogue and good conversation there, but abortion is going to force the hand on how the

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<sup>35</sup> Wallis, Jim. 2004. “Pro-Life Democrats?” *Sojourners Magazine*, 33(6), pg. 5.

Democratic Party lands on its intensity of outreach to evangelicals. On the one hand, it is very possible to reach into evangelical communities and create working relationships without really having to address abortion. At the same time, if you are going to truly pull evangelicals away from the right and at the very least sit them down in the middle, in the swing universe, then abortion does become something that needs to be addressed.”<sup>36</sup>

Yet among many of the Democratic faithful, abortion is an issue with little to address. For instance, when longtime Democratic activist Ben Calhoun was asked if it was a wise decision for Democrats to court evangelical voters by running pro-life Democrats in socially conservative states, Ben responded at length with:

“The Democratic Party has been guilty as sin in terms of allowing their political opponents to frame the debate...the right in this country learned a while ago that when you say something enough times, it becomes—for a large number of people—true. In my view, this has influences [on] how the Democratic Party has gone about selecting candidate to run. The Democratic Party seems to have accepted the notion that we live in a center-right nation, and that it’s simply unacceptable to govern from the left. Through repetition, the right wingers in this country have used mainstream media outlets, as well as Fox and AM radio to create a narrative that if any politician dares increase social services, introduce a progressive tax code, or increase government regulation, they’ll be hurriedly thrown out of office...

“...I think this nation is more progressive on the issues than most people realize or want to admit. Based on this point alone, I’m against running the likes of Stupak and his ilk. However, some might challenge that point, so I’ll go ahead and point out the more practical reason. For the Democratic Party, it’s not only bad practice to run pro-life candidates, but it’s absolutely idiotic politics, and Bart Stupak made a convincing case for why that’s true.

“The Democratic Party is (supposed to be) the party that represents women’s rights, and the right to make the difficult choice to have an abortion. It’s got

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Burns Strider on faith outreach and the Democratic Party, July 23, 2009.



to be a selling pint. If we're willing to endorse candidates who will compromise that value, then why should the party even take a stance on it at all? We might as well be saying the party has no official stance on the issue or just give in and let the right have what they want! Because if we run pro-life zealots like Stupak, 1) the party betray itself and its members when those candidates support pro-life legislation, 2) it runs the risk that those members will not be on board with the most important legislative items when it matters most. Stupak did exactly that; and for what? In the end the Amendment was never fully adopted and the party still looked disorganized and weak (which was true). For Stupak he not only angered the party's base, but he also was called a [']baby killer['] by pro-lifers when he settled for a compromise. That last point is very important. Even though he nearly derailed the pinnacle of the Democratic agenda, and even managed a compromise that was in conflict with the purported pro-choice stance of the Democratic Party, he still never gained any allies on the right. In fact, he only drew attention enough to anger them even more.

“The Democratic Party will never gain the support of the religious zealots that make up the pro-life crowd no matter how hard we try. That particular sect of the electorate will never settle for a compromise, and will never cote Democratic anyway. We should stop wasting time and money trying to find compromises that will never be found.”<sup>37</sup>

While the decidedly liberal Mike Hartley responded to the same question with:

“As for nominating pro-life Democrats... I feel it is a mistake. Abortion rights is a key indicator and insight into an individual's viewpoint on other civil rights issues. I am generally leery of anybody who would force an unwanted child into this already grossly overpopulated world, but there is an important political and philosophical issue underlying your question. In my mind, your question relates to mass-party politics and the 2 party system (really the 1.5 party system because there is little difference in my mind between Democrats and Republicans anymore).

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Ben Calhoun on faith outreach, abortion and the Democratic Party, June 28, 2010.

I am far more comfortable with coalition building than I am with our two party system. On an issue this pivotal, there should be no such thing as a pro-life Democrat. There should be no "Blue Dog Democrats," no "moderate conservatives" or my personal favorite, "Reagan Democrats." Politicians should not be allowed to hide behind the title of Democrat while behaving like a Republican to get elected in a "red state" or conservative district.<sup>38</sup>

Concerns such as these only echo past unease raised by liberal political activists and observers who similarly argue that by recruiting pro-life candidates, the Democratic Party runs the risk of moving to the right. For instance, former NARAL president Kate Michaelman is on record as saying, "It is a problem when leading Democrats publicly recruit candidates who do not share the core values of the party," adding "I don't think you ever win in the long term by sacrificing core principles. The right wing has never done that."<sup>39</sup> While Ruth Marcus wrote prior the 2006 midterm elections:

"The risk is that, in the process of maneuvering, Democrats' reframing and rebranding could edge into retreating on core principles...

"It's fine for Hillary Clinton to talk about the 'tragedy' of abortion, or for Democrats to emphasize the importance of reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies. But I get awfully nervous when Redeem the Vote's Brinson says of abortion, 'As long as the national Democratic Party makes that a centerpiece of their platform or something they're advocating, as long as that's front and center and they're saying women have a right to do this, it's going to turn off religious voters.'

"So, by all means, let Democrats woo evangelicals and cast the message in a way that speaks to religious voters. But in doing so, keep in mind: What does it profit a party to gain a demographic but lose its soul?"<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Interview with Mike Heartly on faith outreach, abortion and the Democratic Party, July 12, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Ertelt, Steven. 2005. "Abortion Advocates Still Upset by Pro-Life Senate Candidates." *LifeNews.com*. Found online at: <<http://www.lifenews.com/nat1226.html>> (accessed August 16, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Marcus, Ruth. 2006. "The New Temptation of Democrats". *The Washington Post*. Found online at: <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/22/AR2006052201154.html>> (accessed June 5, 2010).

In evaluating these concerns, an interesting research question arises. Namely, that while Democrats have succeeded in recapturing control of Congress, a feat achieved in-large part by running socially conservative and pro-life Democrats in many moderate and swing districts, has there been a noticeable shift to the political right on the issue of abortion on the part of elected congressional Democrats? To answer this question, it is helpful to turn to the congressional voting records.

### ***Have Congressional Democrats Moved to the Right on Abortion?***

Founded in 1973 as a response to that years Supreme Court ruling, Roe v. Wade, which legalized abortion in America, the National Right to Life Committee is today the largest pro-life organization in the United States with more than 3,000 chapters in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Its monthly news letter is read by more than 400,000 activists, and Forbes Magazine has listed the NRLC as the eighth most influential lobbying group in Washington D.C.<sup>41</sup> Every year, the NRLC releases a congressional scorecard, in which members of congress are graded based upon the votes they cast for specific pieces of legislation in which the NRLC has a particular interest. At the end of each Congress a complete congressional scorecard is released.

As the NRLC is opposed to all abortions, including in cases of rape, incest and physical harm to the mother, their congressional scorecards serve as an ideal barometer against which congressional voting patterns can be better evaluated. If for instance progressive critics such as Ruth Marcus are correct, then we should see an increase in the number of Democrats who regularly vote in accordance with the NRLC from the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress and on.<sup>42</sup> This paper has compiled every NRLC congressional score card since the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress (the earliest available score card made available by the NRLC online).<sup>43</sup> It has reviewed the votes of every Democrat in the United States House of Representatives for the past 14 years and has noted any Democrat receiving an NRLC score of 50 percent or more. In each Congress, the total number of Democrats receiving a score of 50 percent or more has been added up and

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<sup>41</sup> Found online at: <<http://www.pfaw.org/pfaw/general/default.aspx?oid=4103>> (accessed August 16, 2010).

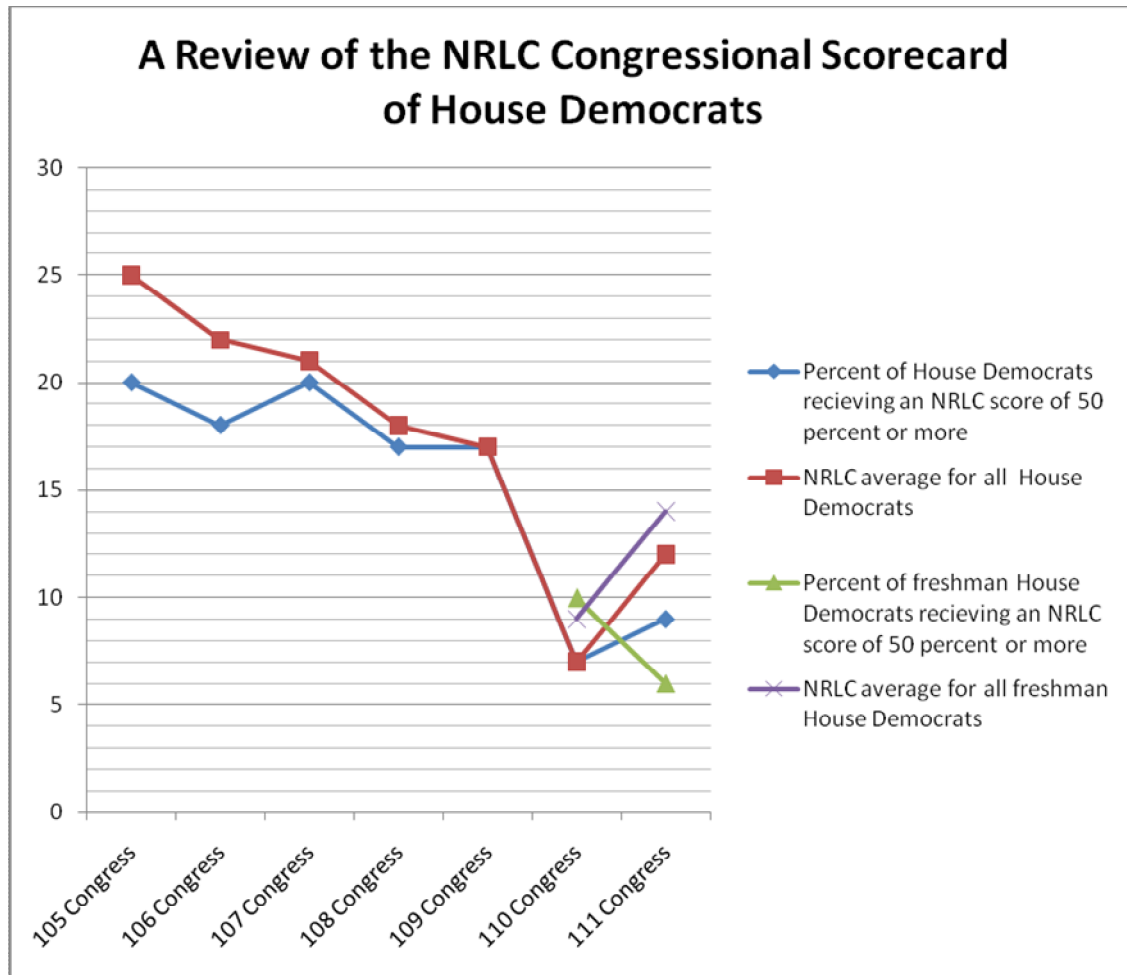
<sup>42</sup> The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress was seated in 2006 and is the first Congress since the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress in which House Democrats were in the majority. Moreover, the 2006 midterm elections are also the first election in which the Democratic National Party (DNC) and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) invested significant resources in faith outreach, while also running moderate and socially conservative candidates in several targeted elections.

<sup>43</sup> NRLC Congressional Scorecards can be found online at: <<http://capwiz.com/nrlc/home/>> (accessed August 16, 2010).

subsequently compared against that of other Congresses. Moreover, as the number of Democrats varies with each Congress, a percentage figure has been similarly provided.

Contrary to the warnings of Marcus and others, evidence at this time seemingly negates the premise that running socially moderate and pro-life Democrats in competitive congressional districts is otherwise forcing the party to the abandon reproductive rights. Indeed, as the graph below demonstrates, the propensity by which House Democrats have cast pro-life votes has consistently fallen since the 105 Congress, with the most dramatic decline coming in-between the 109<sup>th</sup> and 110<sup>th</sup> Congress', the very years in which Democrats sought to broaden their appeal to evangelical voters.

Table 1.0



Another interesting finding of this study is the percentage of House Democrats receiving a score of 50 percent or more from the NRLC. While this figure usually trends with the overall NRLC House Democratic average, we see a remarkable break when freshman House Democrats from the 110<sup>th</sup> and 111<sup>th</sup> Congresses are singled out.<sup>44</sup> Indeed in these instances we see the exact opposite of the hypothesis to be the case. Thus while freshman House Democrats did cast more pro-life votes in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress than they did in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, the overall percentage of these House Democrats who received a NRLC score of 50 percent or more, not only fell when compared against the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, but also fell below the average for the entire House caucus. This evidence suggests that while it may be accurate to describe many newer House Democrats as being more socially moderate, they are far from being solidly pro-life. Instead, these Democrats may be seeking to find some sort of middle ground, whereby they can pacify a more conservative constituency back home while also appeasing the more liberal elements of their political base. In these instances, we often find that many of newer House Democrats, while ultimately supportive of a woman's right to chose in many, if not all cases, offer such support conditionally and are unwilling to provide federal funds to subsidize abortions. Along these lines, we would also presume that many of these newer, more socially conservative Democrats would also be less supportive of abortions occurring later in the pregnancy. However, since Democrats have assumed control of the House in 2006, such a vote has never occurred, which raises another important point, namely the importance of congressional agenda control.

### ***Explanation of Findings: The Importance of Congressional Agenda Control***

Congressional agenda control is a major political advantage for any governing party. By controlling which pieces of legislation receive a floor vote and which do not; congressional leaders have at their disposal a major public relations weapon. By controlling floor votes, congressional leaders, according to Cox and McCubbins can exercise their agenda control in either a 'positive' or 'negative' manner. Negative agenda control is exercised by keeping

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<sup>44</sup> Please note that this study excludes Roll Call Vote 391 of 6/24/10, a bill entitled Democracy is Strengthened by Casting Light on Spending in Elections Act, or the DISCLOSE Act for short. Although the NRLC considers DISCLOSE as a 'life' issue, such considerations are an extension at best. What DISCLOSE sought to do was amend the Federal Elections Act of 1971 so to better prohibiting foreign influence in Federal elections, and additionally sought to prohibit government contractors from making expenditures in such elections. It also sought to establish additional financial disclosure requirement for parties spending in Federal elections. DISCLOSE is viewed by many in politics as a small, yet important piece of legislation aimed at circumventing the Supreme Court's recent *Citizens United* ruling, a decision which effectively allows corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money in elections.

“issues off the floor agenda that would foreseeably displease significant portions of the party.”<sup>45</sup> As such, negative agenda control is a common legislative strategy pursued when significant disagreement is had on various policy issues. By contrast, positive agenda control manifests around issues of considerable political agreement, though as Cox and McCubbins also point out, it “varies with the degree to which the party membership agrees on what the party’s collective reputation should be.”<sup>46</sup> Meaning that the more polarizing an issue is, the less likely it is to receive a floor vote.

On the issue of abortion Democrats have, since recapturing the House, routinely exercised considerable political discretion, that is to say a ‘negative’ agenda strategy, when in it comes to pursuing their legislative goals. It is arguable that in part this might have to do with the fact that abortion laws in America are among the least restrictive in the world and as such, many congressional Democrats may simply be happy with the status quo and thus feel little need to push for any further legal protections. However, such reasoning fails to take into account the United States prohibition banning federal subsidization of abortion procedures, and numerous other state laws, such as parental notification laws and mandatory counseling and waiting periods, all of which groups such as NOW, NARAL and Planned Parenthood would love to see gone. As such, it is much more likely that the reason why Democrats have pursued a negative agenda strategy on this particular issue is because by doing otherwise, they would raise significant public attention to a deeply polarizing issue, thereby placing many of their caucus members and political allies in politically precarious positions. As such, in choosing which abortion issues to address, Democrats have chosen a more benign legislative strategy, focusing on issues of stem cell research and the lifting of the global gag rule:<sup>47</sup> two issues that pleased their base but that received little public outcry.

By contrast, Republicans, when they were in the majority, regularly made use of their legislative agenda control to bring forward issues that would not only divide congressional Democrats internally, but which would also place their political rivals at odds with the broader America electorate. As the graph below demonstrates, Republicans have had a much higher propensity to vote on abortion legislation than their political counterparts.

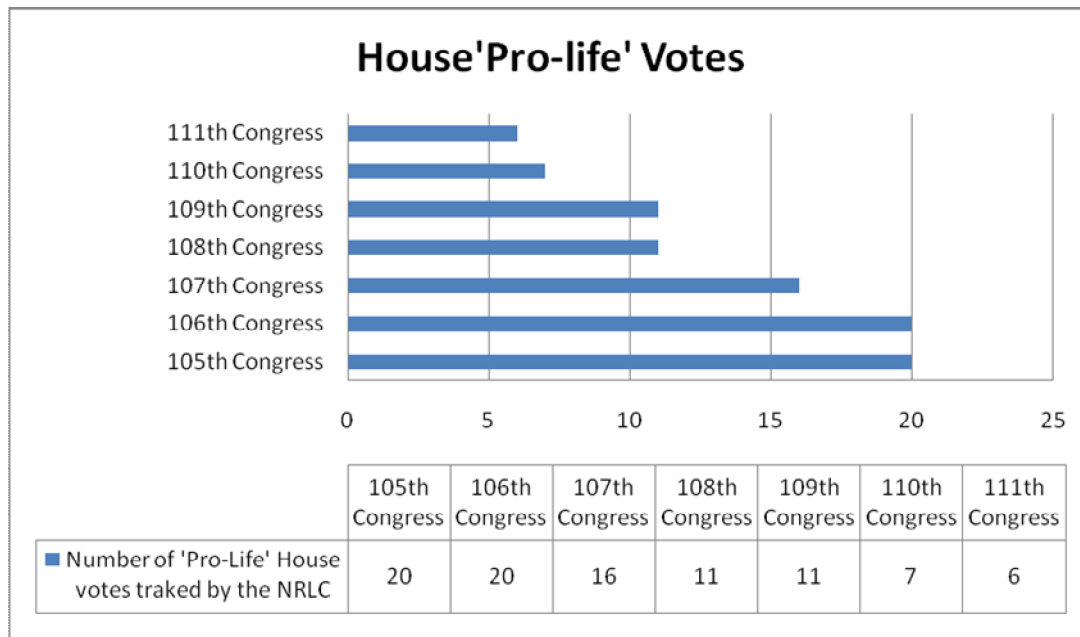
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<sup>45</sup> Cox, Gary and Matthew McCubbins. 2002. “Agenda Power in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1877to 1986.” In Brady, David W. and Matthew D. McCubbins. 2002. *Party, Process and Political Change in Congress: New Perspectives on the History of Congress*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; pg. 152.

<sup>46</sup> Cox and McCubbins, pg. 153.

<sup>47</sup> The ‘global gag rule’ also known as the ‘Mexico City Rule’ is an intermittent American policy which prohibits NGOs receiving federal funds from providing abortion services or discussing abortion options.

Table 2.0



At first glance these findings suggest that Republicans are a more homogenous body than their Democratic opponents, at least on matters of abortion. Yet figures can be deceiving. When, for instance, we examine the various pieces of legislation that the Republican leadership allowed voting on, never do we find a bill banning abortion outright, as this in itself would be greatly controversial within Republican ranks. Instead, abortion votes under the Republican leadership were on issues selected to place Democrats at odds with American public opinion. For example bills criminalizing third trimester abortions, commonly referred to as 'partial birth abortions,' were regularly brought to floor votes. Such legislation was introduced no fewer than 9 times throughout the 105<sup>th</sup>, 106<sup>th</sup>, 107<sup>th</sup> and 108<sup>th</sup> Congresses.<sup>48</sup> However, since Democrats have come to power in the House, Speaker Pelosi has yet to give any bill addressing third trimester abortions a floor debate. Such a move is perfectly logical when one considers the political realities Pelosi is faced with. For starters, unrestricted access to third trimester abortions is largely opposed by the majority of the American public and similarly by many House Democrats. Moreover, as the status quo currently protects a woman's right to have a third trimester abortion regardless of her rationale, there is little if any upside for Pelosi in bringing this issue to the floor. Instead,

<sup>48</sup> These bills included: Roll Call No. 65 (03/20/1997), Roll Call No. 500 (10/08/1997), Roll Call No. 325 (07/23/1998), Roll Call No. 104 (04/05/2000), Roll Call No. 342 (07/24/2002), Roll Call No. 343 (07/24/2002), Roll Call No. 241 (06/04/2003), Roll Call No. 242 (06/04/2003), Roll Call No. 530 (10/02/2003).

Pelosi, like her Republican counterparts before her, has instead focused on reproductive issues that her party is in considerable agreement on, and that cast Democrats in a positive light while at the same time vilifying Republicans.

### ***Conclusion***

Presuming that the congressional leadership of the Democratic Party is staunchly pro-choice, it could be assumed that pursuing an electoral strategy, in which pro-life Democrats are tapped to run in more socially conservative and heavily evangelical districts and states, is a wise political move for anyone interested in defending abortion rights in America. Such Democrats, as recent history has demonstrated, have been successful in wooing evangelical voters away from the Republican Party. Yet such a strategy is not without its pitfalls. As the recent congressional healthcare debacle has demonstrated, even caucus members of relatively low rank can cause significant legislative headaches, as was the case with the Stupak amendment.<sup>49</sup> Still, such un-welcomed events (as the Stupak saga was) are arguably an acceptable price to pay considering all that the Democrats have achieved since the disastrous 2004 election. Since then, Democrats have wised-up to the fact that they can no longer simply ignore the religious voter. As a result, Democrats have undertaken extensive faith outreach efforts and have purposely focused on issues of common ground. Fortunately for Democrats, recent theological developments within the evangelical community have placed the issue of environmental protection front and center for many evangelical voters. To further close the gap between such voters and the Democrat party, Democrats have shown themselves willing to run several pro-life candidates in many high profile races, a fact which does not sit well with many abortion rights activists. Yet far from moving the party to the right on the issue of abortion, as has been the concern of many of these abortion activists, a review of the congressional voting record indicates that the opposite to be the case. This anomaly can be explained using existing theories on congressional agenda control. Such theories demonstrate that while the number of pro-life Democrats might be on the rise, so long as pro-choice Democrats assume congressional leadership, abortion rights will not only be protected, but likely expanded upon, if only marginally.

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<sup>49</sup> The Stupak-Pitts amendment was offered prior to the House passage of the Affordable Healthcare for America Act, which prohibited federal funds from being used to cover any health plan which covered abortion procedures. The amendment nearly sank healthcare reform and helped to solidify its opposition.