by Penny Pullen
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Winning a Race Without Compromise

Are "pro-life" officeholders running scared?

We've all seen evidence of panic in the campaigns of some long-dependable pro-life lawmakers, and that's risky enough for our cause. But even in their public duties now, many are afraid to speak up for life, introduce pro-life laws or even vote for the measures we need in order to move the law away from its embrace of death.

What has happened to touch off this fear? Many so-called pro-life incumbents have been watching other pro-life candidates lose elections, making those in office afraid to fight for the babies.

There are exceptions, but for the most part there can be no doubt: pro-life officeholders are losing their nerve. That's the bad news. The good news is that the job of restoring their political backbone is a relatively straightforward mission: elect as many pro-life candidates as possible.

As simple as that goal sounds, accomplishing the task has become increasingly difficult since 1989, when the Supreme Court handed down its *Webster* decision, allowing states to enforce protective laws reducing the number of abortions.

Pro-abortion forces have mobilized their troops in response to the *Webster* decision far better and with much greater forethought than have pro-life organizations. The cost of this strategic lapse has been devastating: needless electoral defeats of pro-life candidates at all levels, and a loss of will among many pro-life officeholders who have been able to survive the pro-abortion campaign onslaught.

Near-panic among the ranks of pro-life elected officials and candidates has led to defections, and those defections have discouraged the grass-roots pro-lifers. But the cause does not permit backing down. We must play catch-up, and we're running out of time.

The truth behind our cause, though, gives it strength, and by reminding ourselves of its strength we can begin restoring confidence where it's needed most—among our officeholders and future candidates. Then other candidates, volunteers and converts to the pro-life position will be won over in the myriad forums and debates where articulate, persuasive pro-life candidates will argue the cause of life.

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As two partisans for life who have been involved in over 200 campaigns for pro-life candidates, we have reached the conclusion that 90 percent of winning an elected office as an avowed pro-lifer comes down to this single word: confidence.

We in the pro-life movement have long known that it is political suicide for a pro-life candidate to change his or her position on abortion. Any waffling on the issue is crazy. It never attracts pro-aborts and always chases off all pro-life support the formerly pro-life candidate ever had.

Switching is not the only risky approach. Any shyness or hesitancy to articulate a pro-life candidate's views on abortion is also a recipe for defeat.

These have been our candidates' problems since *Webster*: shyness, truncated responses to questions relating to abortion, and a mistaken belief—accepted wholesale by hundreds of pro-life legislative candidates—that it's best to say as little as possible about abortion in secular settings involving the general public. The pro-life candidate is perceived as uncomfortable with his or her own position, as if it were not really the candidate's own. The result we see is defeat, time and again.

Thus the starting point for every pro-life candidate is to go over the reasons for pro-life commitment—either alone, or with family and pastor. Prayer is indispensable in this process. Those whose position is rooted in deeply held convictions will have the easiest task of resisting discouragement and intimidation.

Those who take a principled position will most easily project confidence, and their victories will put the pro-life cause back into the favored position it once enjoyed as a political movement.

Nevertheless, it's a fact that pro-life candidates often become frustrated

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in presenting their stand against abortion. Their position is often reported in loaded terms, painting their stand as being "against women's rights," for example.

Even more frustrating are the tactics used by some pro-abortion candidates who resort to personal attacks in lieu of substantive debate. A pro-life candidate may be charged with being an extremist who enjoys the support of violent people who regularly break the law.

This puts our side at a distinct disadvantage in campaigns, because we don't lie, while our opponents do. Also, they routinely distort the issues. It's a common tactic for them

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to completely misrepresent the effect and purpose of spousal involvement laws. In Illinois, a fathers' involvement bill was introduced in the legislature and voted on in the House. In challenging pro-life incumbents who voted for the bill, pro-abortion candidates characterized the bill as, of all things, the "rapists' rights bill," as if a rapist would go to court, proclaim himself the rapist, and, as the father, forbid the woman to get an abortion. The concept is ludicrous. The purpose of the bill never included any concept of rapists' rights, but that is what the pro-abortion candidates called it in their literature, as if that were really the name of the bill.

With his or her position distorted, and having been called a zealot and extremist who has criminal friends, a pro-life candidate tends to do what almost anyone would do: get mad.

This is exactly what the pro-abortion forces want. It's easier to make an angry person look like an extremist.

The first rule of winning, therefore, is: never get mad. Defuse your frustrations by reminding yourself of the reasons you are pro-life. Concentrate your energies. Get even by winning.

In fact, when you look at the abortion battle from a philosophical point of view, we should never get mad. It's difficult to combat deceit, but an overriding consideration is the fact that a pro-life stance is inherently the positive position. Too often, pro-life candidates appear bitter, mean-spirited and depressed. Yet why should we be defensive about life? The fact that we are for letting babies live should make us the optimists, the believers in the positive contribution every life can make.

Pro-aborts, on the other hand, are for death—the ultimate expression of negativism. The pro-abortion fixation that our popular culture has embraced is inherently a form of death worship. Death (usually for others) is seen as the answer to our problems. So how do pro-aborts translate this negative pro-death concept of abortion into an infectious call for "rights"?

The unfortunate answer it that the pro-abortion crowd has succeeded in making their pro-death message appear positive only because we have let them get away with it.

We must frame the debate. Instead of shying away from the controversy, we need to define what is at stake. We must bring it up in forums even if no one else does. The first candidate to discuss the topic will usually be the candidate who controls the battle line of debate.

We must stake out the highest ground in the debate. Go immediately to the related issues that enjoy broad public support. We do not advocate any backsliding on the Human Life Amendment; quite the

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contrary. However, by attacking pro-abortion candidates on parental notification and spousal notification legislation, for example, we can show just how extreme our opponents are. Meanwhile, pro-life candidates can maintain their position of working to make all abortions illegal without incurring any significant political liability.

We can win as open, honest-to-goodness pro-lifers. The key is the sincerity of the candidates who adopt the pro-life position. It's almost as if the voters need to see some emotion from a pro-life candidate if they are to believe in the candidate's genuine opposition to abortion. Anything less than a heartfelt statement of conviction reduces a pro-life candidate's credibility and character, not just on abortion but on every issue.

The pro-life cause has truth on its side. What it needs now is enough candidates who are prepared—and eager—to argue for life.

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