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M. K. Perker

# Don't Compromise on Abortion

By Peggy Loonan

**T**HUFT COLLINS, Colo. The National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League announced recently that it was changing its name to Naral Pro Choice America. Kate Michelman, its president, called it "the right name for this moment in history." She couldn't be more wrong.

The name change is the latest misstep in the group's nearly 20-year-old strategy to expand its electoral base by appealing to voters who may not feel strongly about abortion rights, but who nevertheless do not like their government telling them what to do. Make the issue about choice, and not rights, and you may win over moderate, even conservative, voters. But such a "victory" comes at too great a cost. It sacrifices principles that the abortion-rights movement holds dear and leaves it operating from a place of weakness and compromise rather than from a place of strength.

Naral has merely set the tone. Most of the other mainstream abortion-rights groups, including the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, have embraced a similar strategy. The groups typically form a coalition to lobby middle-of-the-road legislators and voters to defeat state ballot initiatives seeking to limit access to abortion.

In the process, the forging of alliances with such lawmakers and voters on their terms, rather than on the terms of what should be every woman's right, has only helped put in

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place more barriers to abortion. According to an annual Naral review in 2002, in the last 15 years 21 states have passed measures requiring mandatory waiting periods, 43 have adopted parental involvement laws, 28 have imposed limits on public financing and 28 have passed regulations intended to put abortion clinics out of business.

These restrictions fall disproportionately on poor women and teenagers. While those in the abortion-

## 'Pro-choice' groups pay a price for moving right.

rights movement denounce such limits, their strategy has the perverse effect of allowing them. In the 1998 essay collection "Abortion Wars," William Saletan, a journalist, wrote that conservative voters oppose public financing for abortion because they believe in smaller government and support parental consent because they believe in the sovereignty of families. The abortion-rights movement never foresaw that candidates wearing the mantle of "pro choice" to win swing voters would end up, Mr. Saletan writes, "establishing parental consent laws and prohibitions on tax-funded abortions as corollaries of freedom of choice."

In criticizing Naral's new name, Ken Connor, president of the conservative Family Research Council, accused the group of wanting to "isolate the rhetoric from the reality." He is correct. The abortion-rights movement should be honest. Legal

abortion kills pre-viable human life. But the rights of a pre-viable human life should not take precedence over the rights of a woman.

In addition, the position of the mainstream abortion-rights movement not to confront anti-abortion activists in the street is a mistake. Unchallenged rhetoric and pictures of what appear to be aborted fetuses have left the public feeling shame about legal abortion and have marginalized abortion providers. In order to educate a new generation of women on just what is at stake with Roe v. Wade, the abortion-rights movement should not shy away from blunt language and images of the effects of illegal abortion. Groups that have employed these more aggressive protest tactics have found success. Even Harrison Hickman, a Naral pollster, acknowledged in this newspaper on Jan. 5 that if you showed young voters a coat hanger they wouldn't know what it meant.

I left Naral because I was dissatisfied with its approach. I know there are others who are also frustrated. With the likelihood of vacancies on the Supreme Court, it is imperative for those committed to Roe v. Wade to work toward preserving it in its broadest terms. This will not be achieved by the abortion-rights movement's current strategy or word-play gimmicks by groups like Naral. The time is for moving to the left, not to the right. □