

September 14, 2006

<b>TO:</b>	Interested Parties
<b>FROM:</b>	Rachel Laser, Director of the Culture Project; Michael Earls, Policy Advisor
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	A New Direction on Abortion for Progressives: Winning The Battle of Reasonableness

For over a decade, Republicans have consistently won at the ballot box among “Abortion Grays”—the 62% of voters who are in the middle on abortion and think either that abortion should be mostly legal or mostly illegal.<sup>1</sup> This is because pro-life conservatives changed their public strategy from being abortion banners to abortion regulators (through such measures as 24-hour waiting periods, partial birth abortion bans, parental notification requirements, and fetal pain protections). In so doing, they have been able to win the battle of reasonableness and frame the pro-choice side as out-of touch with the moral complexities most Americans associate with abortion.

In recent months, pro-choice advocates and Democratic officeholders have attempted to move the debate by focusing on “prevention,” essentially a strategy to reduce unintended pregnancies that may lead to abortions. This strategy has met with only modest success because “prevention” does not move people in the same way as “abortion” does. Americans support prevention overwhelmingly, but it does not directly answer the question of where progressives stand on the issue of abortion.

The recent introduction of the Ryan-DeLauro “Reducing the Need for Abortion and Supporting Parents Act” by pro-life and pro-choice Democrats presents an unprecedented opportunity for progressives to change the abortion debate in Washington. This bill brings together the pro-choice community’s goal of preventing unintended pregnancy with the pro-life community’s attention to supporting pregnant women (with the addition of progressives’ traditional support for parents) and culminates in an honest and effective initiative to reduce abortions in America. It also uses the right message frame—that of reducing abortions while preserving personal liberties—which we will discuss more below.

What follows is a new message and strategy on abortion for progressives, which preserves a woman’s right to an abortion, but appeals to the vast middle who would like to see fewer abortions in America and to find common ground in this divisive debate.

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<sup>1</sup> See Third Way’s 2006 message and strategy document “Winning the Abortion Grays.”

## THE MESSAGE

Progressives' position on abortion should be:

***We must reduce the number of abortions while protecting personal liberties.***

In Third Way's own poll of 800 registered voters from July 2006,<sup>2</sup> Americans supported the goal of "reducing the number of abortions in America while still preserving the basic right to have one" by a 69%-29% ratio. **The "Abortion Grays" - who comprised 62% of the poll's respondents - supported this message by a 79%-20% rate.** A majority of those respondents who believe abortion should be legal in all cases (61%-37%) also supported this goal. Even 37% of those who believe that abortion should be illegal in all cases supported the goal (58% opposed). Our recommended message attracts Americans from all sides of the abortion debate, and it does incredibly well with the exact audience progressives should be targeting.

Progressives should define conservatives' pro-life position as follows:

***Conservatives' goal is to reduce the number of abortions by putting people in jail and banning all abortions.***

Our poll shows that voters hate prison as a response to abortion. Nearly 70% of voters oppose abortion laws that would put people in jail, including 70% of Abortion Grays.<sup>3</sup>

## Redefining the Abortion Issue: Four Steps to Winning the Abortion Grays

Recent events, such as the introduction of the Ryan-DeLauro "Reducing the Need for Abortion and Supporting Parents Act" by pro-life and pro-choice Democrats and the South Dakota abortion ban, offer an opportunity for progressives to win the battle of reasonableness on abortion.

### **Step #1: Realize that attempting to avoid the issue does not avoid the issue.**

On cultural issues, silence for progressives isn't golden; silence is an admission of guilt. Americans will assign the most culturally liberal positions and values to you unless you define yourself otherwise. On abortion - you will default to supporting abortion as birth control.

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<sup>2</sup> Third Way Poll, Summer 2006. Conducted by Dutko Research. See Appendix A for more information.

<sup>3</sup> Third Way poll.

**Step #2: Define yourself as the candidate who will work to reduce the number of abortions, while protecting the right to have one.**

One in five U.S. pregnancies ends in abortion, and there are approximately 1.3 million abortions performed in the U.S. each year.<sup>4</sup> No matter which side of the debate you are on, that's too many. Neither the pro-choice nor pro-life forces make abortion reduction a focus of their messaging. One side sees abortion as a right; the other, as a sin. As a country, we have a responsibility to do all we can to lower the astoundingly high rate of unintended pregnancies (the majority of which result in abortion). We also have a responsibility to help a pregnant woman who may want to have a child by giving her support throughout her pregnancy continuing into motherhood.

Progressives should seek to reduce the number of abortions while preserving the core progressive ideal of personal liberty. This approach neutralizes this poisonous debate and gives progressives the ability to seize the moral high ground in the eyes of the majority of Americans, while staying true to core progressive ideals. It appeals to the 60-68% of Americans who consistently support *Roe v. Wade*. It also appeals to the over 70%<sup>5</sup> of Americans who feel that abortion is morally wrong—either sometimes (49%) or all the time (24%). As stated earlier, our poll shows that this message has great appeal (79%-20%) among Abortion Grays.

**Step #3: Define your opponent as seeking to criminalize abortion.**

It is critical to define your opponent by taking pro-life conservatives at their word and forcing him/her either to defend criminalization of abortion or anger his/her base. That is what conservatives have done with partial-birth abortion and parental notification and consent.

Progressives have the opportunity to turn the tables. By focusing on the goal of abortion reduction, you can readily expose your opponent's preference for criminalization. You want to reduce abortions through an effective and common sense approach that makes abortion less necessary, whereas your opponent wants to reduce abortion through putting people in jail. As referenced earlier, polling shows that voters hate prison as a response to abortion, with nearly 70% opposing abortion laws that would put people in jail.

**Step #4: Have an agenda that finds common ground to reduce abortions.**

Americans are tired of the divisiveness that has come to symbolize the abortion

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<sup>4</sup> Alan Guttmacher Institute and Physicians for Reproductive Choice, "An overview of abortion in the United States," 2003.

<sup>5</sup> The Pew Research Center for People and the Press, "Pragmatic Americans Liberal and Conservative on Social Issues," August 3, 2006.

issue. A July 2006 study by the Pew Research Center found that two out of three Americans (66%) support finding "a middle ground" on abortion and that fewer than 30% of Americans (29%) believe "there's no room for compromise when it comes to abortion laws."<sup>6</sup> Over 70% of Abortion Grays in the Pew poll<sup>7</sup> supported the "middle ground" option, while 25% of Grays believed there was no room to compromise.

Policies that include positions from both pro-life and pro-choice perspectives can be packaged as the most honest and effective approach to reducing the number of abortions in America. Legislation, such as the "Reducing the Need for Abortion and Supporting Parents Act," which seeks to reduce abortions by lowering the number of unintended pregnancies (typical of the pro-choice side) and offering support to pregnant women who may want to have a child (typical of the pro-life side), provides a constructive and comprehensive approach to reducing abortions that speaks to Americans' desire to end the bitterness between the two sides.

*For each of these sections, Third Way can provide additional information and analysis. Please feel free to go to our website [www.third-way.com](http://www.third-way.com) and click on The Culture Project—or contact Rachel Laser ([rlaser@third-way.com](mailto:rlaser@third-way.com)) at 202-775-3768 x202.*

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<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Abortion Grays in the Pew poll believed abortion should be "illegal with exceptions" or "legal with stricter limits."

## Appendix A

<b>Abortion Reduction: Third Way Summer 2006 Poll on Abortion*</b>							
<b>Would you say you (rotate: agree or disagree) with the statement:</b>							
<i>“With one out of every five pregnancies ending in abortion, we should try to reduce the number of abortions in America while still preserving the basic right to have one.”</i>							
		<b>ABORTION GRAYS (62%)</b>					
		<b>Legal in all (20%)</b>	<b>Legal in most (33%)</b>	<b>Illegal in most (29%)</b>	<b>Illegal in all (15%)</b>	<b>DNK (1.5%)</b>	<b>Refused (1.5%)</b>
<b>Agree (68.7%)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (34.3%)</b>	30.2%	42.1%	38.2%	14.8%	41.7%	33.3%
	<b>Somewhat Agree (34.4%)</b>	30.9%	46%	30.3%	22.1%	41.7%	26.7%
<b>Disagree (28.9%)</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree (12.8%)</b>	13.6%	6.9%	16.2%	18%	8.3%	13.3%
	<b>Strongly Disagree (16.1%)</b>	23.5%	2.7%	14.9%	40.2%	0%	6.7%
<b>DNK (1.1%)</b>		0.6%	1.1%	0%	3.3%	8.3%	0%
<b>Refused (1.4%)</b>		1.2%	1.1%	0.4%	1.6%	0%	20%

\* Americans supported the goal of “reducing the number of abortions in America while still preserving the basic right to have one” by a 69%–29% ratio. The “Abortion Grays”—who comprised 62% of the poll’s respondents—supported this message by a 79%–20% rate. Poll of 800 registered voters nationwide conducted by telephone by Dutko Research on behalf of Third Way, June 26–July 2, 2006.

<b>Abortion Criminalization: Third Way Summer 2006 Poll on Abortion*</b>							
<b>Would you say you (rotate: agree or disagree) with the statement:</b>							
<i>"There are far too many abortions in America and we need to make most abortions illegal, even if that means putting people who have abortions or doctors who perform abortions in jail."</i>							
		<b>ABORTION GRAYS (62%)</b>					
		<b>Legal in all (20%)</b>	<b>Legal in most (33%)</b>	<b>Illegal in most (29%)</b>	<b>Illegal in all (15%)</b>	<b>DNK (1.5%)</b>	<b>Refused (1.5%)</b>
<b>Agree (30.9%)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (15.3%)</b>	2.5%	3.4%	17.1%	55.7%	0%	13.3%
	<b>Somewhat Agree (15.6%)</b>	2.5%	6.9%	33.8%	19.7%	8.3%	6.7%
<b>Disagree (67.6%)</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree (18%)</b>	4.3%	20.7%	28.1%	9%	33.3%	26.7%
	<b>Strongly Disagree (49.6%)</b>	90.1%	67.8%	20.6%	14.8%	33.3%	33.3%
<b>DNK (0.9%)</b>		0.6%	0.8%	0.4%	0.8%	16.7%	0%
<b>Refused (0.6%)</b>		0%	0.4%	0%	0%	8.3%	20%

\* Americans disagreed with the concept of putting people in jail by a 68%-31% ratio. The "Abortion Grays"—who comprised 62% of the poll's respondents—disagreed with the concept at a 70%-30% rate. Poll of 800 registered voters nationwide conducted by telephone by Dutko Research on behalf of Third Way, June 26-July 2, 2006.