

Forum

AN ABORTION SCRIPT

WASHINGTON — Republican presidential candidates must rescue their party from the sterility into which its abortion debate has fallen. Herewith a suggested statement for any candidate seeking a position palatable to right-to-life realists:



GEORGE WILL

"For those of us determined to regenerate society's reverence for young life, the proposed Human Life Amendment has become a distraction. It encourages the barren politics of catharsis —

striking emotionally satisfying poses unrelated to practical policy. Let me be blunt: An America in which three-quarters of the states would ratify an amendment banning abortion would not need such an amendment. Abortion would already be rare because it would be broadly understood as invariably tinged with tragedy.

"Concerning whether I would use a 'litmus test' to select Supreme Court nominees 'opposed to abortion,' I say that question is miscast. It entices conservatives into endorsing the sort of result-oriented jurisprudence liberals advocate. The proper question concerns general jurisprudence. I would nominate judges whose respect for the Framers' intentions — the Constitution's language and logic — would dispose them to conclude, as many thoughtful supporters of abortion rights do, that *Roe v. Wade* is indefensible as constitutional law.

"The Democratic Party, which distrusts the American people, insists that abortion policy be set by judges. I believe the people can be trusted to legislate abortion policy. Overturn-

ing *Roe* would invigorate democratic debates at the state level concerning parental notification, public funding and partial-birth abortion.

"Temperate people on both sides of the abortion divide can support a requirement for parental notification, less as abortion policy than as sound family policy. Supporters and opponents of abortion can join in opposing public funding as an offense against civility: It is uncivil to compel one's fellow citizens to fund a practice they abhor.

"Partial-birth abortion, too, reveals the real abortion extremism. In this procedure, all but part of the late-term baby's head is delivered from the birth canal, then the skull is collapsed. During Senate debate on banning this procedure, two Democrats, Wisconsin's [Russell] Feingold and New Jersey's [Frank] Lautenberg, were asked: If the baby's head slipped out — if the baby were entirely delivered — then did it have a right to live? Neither 'pro-choice' senator would say that the baby even then had a right to live.

"Who are the extremists now? The American majority, troubled by the casualness of abortion today? Or abortion-rights zealots who regard abortion as no more morally significant than an appendectomy? Formally, the Clinton-Gore position is that abortion should be 'safe and legal, but rare.' Actually, the Clinton-Gore position is dogmatic intolerance of anything that suggests abortion is even slightly problematic, morally.

"Pro-life people, of whom I am one, should not despair because a constitutional amendment will be impossible until it is unnecessary. We can take considerable comfort from the support science increasingly gives to the right-to-life movement's general moral stance.

"For example, I know that young adults who call themselves 'pro-choice' must be uneasy about the incongruity of that belief and their behavior: They frame sonogram pictures of their unborn baby responding to stimuli, and they read in *The Well Baby Book* that, 'Increasing knowledge is increasing the awe and respect we have for the unborn baby and is causing us to regard the unborn baby as a real person long before birth.' And as a patient before birth. Medicine is performing diagnostic and therapeutic wonders, including surgery, on unborn babies.

"Pro-choice and right-to-life Republicans can share the common-sense conviction that the Supreme Court got things exactly wrong when it said it cannot tell when life begins but can tell when 'meaningful' life begins. As president, I will patiently work to deepen the growing unease of the thoughtful American majority about the Democratic Party's position, which is this: Nothing in law or policy or public rhetoric can be tolerated that suggests that an unborn baby has a status more complex than an appendix.

"To encourage the growing anxiety of the American majority about the Democratic Party's culture of abortion, Republicans will be the party of adoption, removing all laws and other impediments, sparing no expense, to achieving a goal more noble even than a landing on the moon — adoptive parents for every unwanted unborn baby.

"My position, stressing moral persuasion as much as political advocacy, will displease Democrats eager to caricature Republicans, journalists hoping for Republican fratricide, and simplifiers of the sort who would edit a stop sign. But it defines a party congenial to all but those who are utterly untroubled by the coarsening casualness with which young life is treated in today's abortion culture."