

## Quayle, Gore and Abortion Flip-Flops

By ALLEN RANDOLPH

Those liberal critics who are jumping at the Quayle abortion "flip" are betraying some unattractive hypocrisy. They show little compassion for Mr. Quayle's initial impulse last week, which in pro-choice terms might be deemed a heartfelt one. The same critics, however, frequently show much compassion for Al Gore's flip on the abortion issue.

Sen. Gore, like his running mate, has recently pledged support of the Freedom of Choice Act, which codifies the *Roe v. Wade* decision. But there is something darkly cynical about Sen. Gore's position on this issue.

The senator's shift on abortion has been chronicled in the press (including in the *New York Times*). But only a closer look reveals the extent and political context of that shift. In fact, during his time in the House, Mr. Gore voted against abortion 27 times and took the pro-choice side five times.

The Gore record on abortion starts back in 1977. During October and November of that year alone, Mr. Gore, then a representative, backed the Hyde Amendment. The amendment banned federally funded abortions in all cases except those when the life of the mother was threatened. Contrary to some reporting, he consistently voted (three times in 1977 alone) against those who wanted to weaken the amendment's language by adding rape and incest cases to the exception list.

Rep. Gore did support an amendment in December of that year that would have inserted the word "forced" before rape and incest and allowed for an exception under those circumstances. "Forced" cases had to be reported "promptly" to police or public health agencies. The idea behind the insertion was to prevent fraudulent reporting by women seeking government subsidy and to prevent exceptions for minors who might claim statutory rape. Women's rights groups were incensed. The measure was defeated, and the next day a vote was taken with the word "forced" deleted from the language of the amendment. Mr. Gore voted against it.

Perhaps the most significant vote cast by then-Rep. Gore was his 1984 "yea" vote in support of the Siljander Amendment to the Civil Rights Act. This was one of the most radically pro-life bills ever voted on in the House. It purported that henceforward the term "person" would include unborn children from the moment of conception. The amendment was defeated, 219-186.

Mr. Gore's letters to constituents reflect the legislator's strong sentiments. In 1980 he wrote an editor of a pro-life periodical: "I am a firm supporter of the Hyde Amendment. I will continue to support efforts that are designed to prevent the use of federal funds" for abortion. By 1983 he stepped up the rhetoric, declaring in a letter to a constituent that "in my opinion it is wrong to spend federal funds for what is arguably the taking of a human life."

In his early days as a senator, in 1987, Mr. Gore supported a bill prohibiting federal funding of abortions except where the life of the mother was endangered. H.R. 1729, a bill introduced by Henry Hyde (the next legislative step for the Hyde Amendment), declared "that abortion takes the life of an unborn child who is a living human being," and that "a right to abortion is not secured by the Constitution of the U.S." Other points included prohibiting federally funded health clinics from performing abortions or referring to them as an option.

Of H.R. 1729, Sen. Gore wrote in 1987 to a constituent: "Its goal, which I share, is to reduce the outrageously large number of abortions which currently take place."

But this was a time when the senator's position was already showing inconsistency. Four times in 1986 he voted for the right of the District of Columbia to fund abortion with public monies. He also opposed the 1986 Helms Amendment requiring parental consent for minors seeking abortion.

Since being elected to the Senate, Mr. Gore has cast 37 votes on the pro-choice line. Despite his 1987 letter in support of H.R. 1729, Mr. Gore voted for a 1990 bill proposed by Sen. Edward Kennedy that contained amendments that would have allowed Department of Health and Human Services clinics to provide "non-directive counseling" (that would mention the option of pregnancy termination).

What are the politics here? The National Abortion Rights Action League accepts a delicate, face-saving excuse for politicians in Mr. Gore's situation. I spoke with a NARAL spokeswoman who explained the situation of politicians in Mr. Gore's position. Her version of the explanation for political shifts goes like this: Politicians personally opposed to abortion voted against it in the knowledge that the Supreme Court protected choice. But now that the court has shifted, those politicians may shift their official position, even while remaining personally opposed.

The catalyst for Mr. Gore's flip appears related to his aspirations for higher office. His record was somewhat obscured during the 1988 Democratic primary debates. Ironically, at that time it was Candidate Gore admonishing Candidate Gephardt for the latter's checkered past on the issue. "I'm going to lay it on the line, Dick," said Mr. Gore in a debate reported in the *Washington Post*. "The next president has to be someone who the people believe will stay with his convictions."

Mr. Gore's anti-abortion record did come to the fore during the race. Shortly after his attack on Mr. Gephardt, Mr. Gore was called on his own record. A Gore aide told Michael Kramer of *U.S. News and World Report*, "In effect, what we have to do is deny, deny, deny." And, "We've muddled the point, and with luck the attention will turn elsewhere."

So, four years later, when CBS's Paula Zahn questioned Mr. Gore on his shift, he responded: "No, not at all. I've had the same position from the very first days in Congress." ABC's Joan Lunden was told by Mr. Gore: "I have always strongly supported the principles embodied in the *Roe v. Wade* decision."

The abortion issue is an important one in this election. It is deeply troubling when candidates refuse to address the issue with even the integrity of radical elements on the pro-choice and right-to-life sides.

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