

Rabbis Differ With Lieberman on Abortion

By JOSEPH A. D'AGOSTINO

Sen. Joseph Lieberman's pro-abortion legislative record contrasts with the pro-life interpretation of Jewish law expressed by some prominent Orthodox rabbis.

Lieberman has consistently voted pro-abortion in his years in the Senate, even voting five times against a ban on partial-birth abortion.

Under traditional Jewish law, "a woman can have an abortion only if her physical existence is threatened, during all stages of development," says Orthodox Rabbi Daniel Lapin, president of Toward Tradition, a group of socially conservative Jews and Christians. "I can say that I am 100% convinced that Jewish tradition demands that Jews align themselves with the religious pro-life movement."

However, said Lapin, "You will always find a rabbi who will back up the vice-presidential candidate." He explained that although abortion is generally proscribed, "the fetus is not a person" under Jewish law. Nor is there necessarily anything that would demand that Lieberman vote for the pro-life legislation that has come before him. "I have no interest in being his policeman of piety," Lapin said. "I can say that his record appears to contradict Jewish values."

Lapin also explained that the Jewish understanding is that the prohibition on abortion applies to all people, not

just Jews. "The Noachite laws specifically cover them," he said. The seven laws God gave to Noah and his descendants apply to all people, whereas the other laws of the Torah apply only to Jews, he explained.

Rabbi Steven Dworken, spokesman for the Rabbinical Council of America, the largest association of Orthodox rabbis in the country, said he did not want to discuss Lieberman's specific record on abortion. As a matter of general principle, he said, "Judaism is not pro-abortion, it is anti-abortion, except in certain instances." Usually the exceptions are understood to be limited to "the life of the mother," he said, but some rabbis have "extended them to the mental life of the mother."

In an article distributed by the Orthodox Union, America's largest group of Orthodox congregations, Rabbi Yaacov Haber says, "If a greater part of the fetus had emerged, or if the head had emerged, then the fetus possesses the status of a person and can not be dismembered, as one may not take another one's life in order to save his own." In a partial-birth abortion, all but the head of the fetus emerges from the body before it is killed. Haber wrote that the consensus Orthodox view is that the only justification for abortion is to prevent severe injury to the

mother, although some authorities interpret that to include damage to "the psychological welfare of the mother."

Douglas Johnson, legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee, said of Lieberman, "He's never supported a restriction on abortion. He's never supported any restriction on federal funding of abortion." Even his highly publicized vote for an amendment on parental notification was a fraud that gutted the concept, Johnson said, because "the amendment said relatives and social workers could give permission for an abortion."

Despite his votes on these issues, Lieberman's personal qualities and conservative positions on issues such as missile defense and school choice have earned him praise from numerous Republican senators. Conservative Sen. Bob Smith (R-N.H.), who serves with Lieberman on the Armed Services and Environment and Public Works Committees and sat with Lieberman on the Governmental Affairs Committee during the investigation of the Chinese money scandal, said, "He's certainly a man of integrity. He's very well respected and well liked. I think he moves the Democratic ticket away from the left a little bit. . . . He defended me when my [Democratic] opponent during my last reelection campaign basically accused me of anti-Semitism."

Lieberman: In His Own Words

Abortion

Larry King: "What about partial-birth abortion?"

Lieberman: "I did not vote to prohibit that procedure, because as horrific as the description of it is, the law of the land clearly is that you cannot ban any procedure at all stages of a pregnancy. In other words, the Supreme Court has said and I think the moral consensus in our society is that up until the point of viability the decision about terminating a pregnancy, no matter what we think personally, has to be between a woman, her doctor, and her own moral standards and God."

King: "Wouldn't most Orthodox Jews be pro-life?"

Lieberman: "It's much more varied. A lot of times people say that, but Jewish law generally on this says that what begins at conception is potential life. And frankly, depending on which rabbi you talk to, some say that the fetus at viability, when it can at least theoretically sustain itself on its own, outside the body of the mother, that's when life begins. Many other rabbis say that it begins at birth. So it's a matter of personal judgment."

—CNN's "Larry King Live"

Aug. 8, 2000

"Yet, the more I focused on it, the more I got concerned about the number of these abortions that are being performed—and as small as that number is, the number is unacceptable—the more I had to face my own personal conclusion that any abortion is unacceptable. Any abortion is horrific."

—Senate debate

May 15, 1997

Entertainment Industry

"But, look, I have got to stand by my principles. I got into this as a father, and I think Bill Bennett did as well. I watched some stuff that my youngest, my daughter Hanna, was watching when she was five, and I hated the message it was sending her about violence, and about sex, and about respect and civility. So what we have done is reach out and call out to folks in Hollywood, and the record industry, the video game industry, television, and say exercise some self-restraint. Bill Bennett and I believe with a fierce devotion in the 1st Amendment."

—CNN's "Larry King Live"

Aug. 8, 2000

"The network that once gave us Edward R. Murrow and Jack Benny, and more recently gave us Dan Rather and Dr. Quinn, chose this year to dump Dr. Death and Dr. Depravily into the public square."

—Presenting "Silver Sewer" award to CBS's "60 Minutes"

Dec. 7, 1998

Homosexual Rights

"I've been an original co-sponsor, one of the lead co-sponsors of the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, [which] says you don't discriminate against people in the workplace based on sexual orientation. I was actually against from the beginning the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy, because I felt that if you're gay and you want to serve in the military, you ought to be given that right, not have to conceal your identity."

—CNN's "Larry King Live"

Aug. 8, 2000

Buddhist Temple Fundraiser

"It seems to me we are pursuing a question here which is irrelevant to the purpose of our inquiry. What he [Al Gore] knew or should have known [about the fundraising nature of his Buddhist temple event] has no relevance. . . . It is unfair to attempt to hold the Vice President accountable in any way for the wrongdoing. . . . that probably occurred at the Hsi Lai Temple."

—Senate Governmental Affairs hearing

Sept. 4, 1997

Negative Campaigning

"Look at what Gov. Bush is proposing. Instead of saving Social Security, he's on a course to savage it with a privatization scheme that would take \$1 trillion out of the nest egg that belongs to every worker in America, and jeopardize the program stability and the security of the working future of the American people."

—Speech to AFL-CIO

Aug. 7, 2000

"A remarkable wave of innovative thinking is advancing the concept of privatization, some personalization of retirement plans. . . . I think in the end that individual control of part of the retirement/Social Security funds has got to happen."

—Interview in the San Diego Union-Tribune

April 18, 1998