

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



April 07, 2013

## **IF LIFE BEGINS AT FERTILIZATION . . .**

It is likely that by the time you've finished reading this piece, Kansas Governor Sam Brownback will have signed into law the nation's newest anti-abortion measure. Passed overwhelmingly (along strictly party lines) by both the Kansas House (90-30) and Senate (28-10), the measure asserts that life begins "at fertilization." This declaration is embodied in "personhood" measures, which have been on the ballot in other states. Such measures are aimed at revising state constitutions to ban all abortions; I am happy to report that none of these

proposals have yet to be enacted, though North Dakota voters will have one on their ballot in 2014. (It may be recalled that Mississippi voters turned down a "personhood" measure on their ballot last year.)



In addition to declaring that life begins at the moment of fertilization, the new Kansas law also blocks tax breaks for abortion providers, bans abortions performed "solely because of the baby's sex," prohibits abortion providers from being involved in public school sex education classes, and spells out in more detail what information doctors must provide to patients seeking abortions (specifically, addressing breast cancer as "a possible risk of abortion.")

The provisions outlawing various tax breaks are designed to prevent the Sunflower State from subsidizing abortions, even indirectly. For example, in Kansas, health care providers don't have to pay state sales tax on items they purchase; but, according to the new law, abortion providers would be denied

that break. Also, a woman could not include abortion costs if she deducts medical expenses on her income taxes. Unquestionably mean-spirited, this section of the new Kansas law -- [HB 2253](#) -- will most likely be found unconstitutional. So far as the necessity of outlawing abortions due to the baby's sex, a [2008 study](#) by Columbia University economists Douglas Almond and Lena Edlund concluded that the practice -- widespread in several Asian countries -- is done in the U.S. on a very, very limited basis. This is yet another instance of a solution in search of a problem.

Believe it or not, this new law is *not* the nation's most draconian; that distinction goes to North Dakota and Arkansas which have banned abortions after, respectively, the sixth and twelfth week of pregnancy. Then there is Arizona, which just last year passed a bill declaring that life begins two weeks *before* conception. What's next? The way things are going in most Red State legislatures nothing would surprise me; perhaps empowering a God-fearing bureaucrat with the right to look a woman in the eye and say "Aha! I aver that you are now 1 hour and 32 seconds pregnant!"

Ever since the U.S. Supreme Court handed down their 1973 *Roe v Wade* decision, anti-abortion forces have been prominent actors on the American political stage. And while their presence, power and influence has waxed and waned, they have never totally vanished. Over the past 40 years, in addition to motivating heretofore civically disinterested citizens to participate in the electoral process, they have spread their wings to include many other so-called "values" issues, and nursed the very vocabulary of discourse. What was once "anti-abortion" became "Pro-Life," while both an "embryo" and a "fetus" were transmogrified into a "pre-born child." And, in a stunning act of political legerdemain they managed to somehow convince a sizable portion of these new voters that "just as the Bible commands us to be against abortion, so too does it inform us that the oil depletion allowance is just, higher taxes on the wealthy is a sin, global warming a lie, and government assistance to the poor, the sick, the unemployed and the elderly goes against God's will."

Oh really, since when?

Please don't get me wrong; I am neither a cynic nor an unbeliever. Like my Pro-Life friends, I too am *personally* against abortion. However, unlike most of them, I hold to the Jewish teaching that an embryo is not deemed a fully viable person (בר קיימה); rather, it is of "doubtful validity"; an "appendage of the mother" (עבר ירה אמו). In Jewish law, one does not "sit *shivah*" (the traditional 7-day period of mourning) for a child who expires within 30 days of birth; it is *not* considered viable. I do not believe that human life begins at conception -- let alone at the moment of fertilization. And even though I am, once again, *personally* against

abortion, I do not believe I have the right to tell a woman what she may or may not do. Yes, I know that millions of well-intentioned (and perhaps *not* so well-intentioned) Pro-Life advocates claim that they are "defending the defenseless," and "preserving the sanctity of human life." If this is truly the case, if they truly believe in helping the helpless, then why do so many of them deny assistance once the pre-born exits its mother's womb? Why are so many of the most ardent Pro-Lifers against funding such essentials as Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), Operation Head Start, school lunch programs, healthcare, and education, or deny gay individuals (and couples) the right to legally adopt or even take in foster children?

It just doesn't make sense. Human beings need defending, protection and assistance even *after* they draw breath. If your answer is that "we simply cannot afford all these programs . . . and besides it's not the government's role . . . " then you'd better do some deep soul-searching. Children need a whole lot more protection than corporations; hungry and homeless humans need more assistance than millionaires and billionaires.

All life is sacred -- both inside and outside the womb.

While I do not and cannot agree that life begins at fertilization, I know for a fact that it does not end at birth.

Think about it . . .

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April 13, 2013

## To Be Sincere or Merely Fake It: That is the Question

[Audio Link to "To Be Sincere or to Fake It: That is the Question"](#)

One of my favorite M\*A\*S\*H episodes was entitled "[Foreign Affairs](#)." Originally run during the series' 11th season, the episode centered around a gorgeous visiting French Red Cross worker (played by Melinda Mullins) who falls for the



staid, priggish Major Charles Emerson Winchester III (played by David Ogden Stiers.) At one point, "Martine" (the Red Cross lady), having rebuffed the advances of the randy Hawkeye (Alan Alda), invites Charles to sit with her at the "Old Club." Seeing this, Hawkeye asks his tent mate B.J. (Mike Farrell), "What did he (Charles) try that I didn't?"

"Maybe Sincerity?" B.J. answers. Hawkeye gets the laugh line when he responds "*Sincerity? I could fake that!*"

Hawkeye's retort might well serve as the slogan for the Republican National Committee's recently concluded gathering out in Hollywood. For in attempting to figure out what went wrong in the 2012 election and how to fix it in time for 2016, the GOP has essentially come to the same conclusion as the fictional Captain Pierce: when all else fails, fake sincerity. Of course, there are two huge differences between Hawkeye Pierce and the RNC:

1. Hawkeye was -- and always shall be -- a fictional character; the RNC is (supposedly) made up of real people;

2. Hawkeye's aim was to win over a woman; the RNC's to convince women, gays, African Americans, Hispanics and Asian Americans that they really aren't a party that caters only to older white gun-owning Christian men, and that they -- the GOP -- really do share their concerns, respect their differences and speak their language.

Without question, it's a tall order; one, which if it were to succeed, would require a lot of serious soul searching and a newfound commitment to compromise and inclusion. But alas, it would appear that the RNC, like the beloved Benjamin Franklin Pierce, believes they can fake sincerity and get away with it.

Without question, the GOP *is* in a state of utter turmoil. Its base -- the folks who provide the primary votes -- make up the party's most implacably, unrelentingly ultra-conservative wing. These are the folks who are steadfastly pro-life, pro-gun, pro-balanced budget amendment and anti anything proposed by any Democrat. For the most part, these are the ones who believe that the president and his party are committed Marxists; malevolent spores of Satan consciously turning America into a nation of takers. This, the GOP base, is made up mostly of white males -- and a few women. They are at odds with the party's less ultra-conservative, more institutional wing; those who seem to understand that if their party is ever to recapture the White House, they'll need to make some serious changes. On the surface, they "get it."



Or do they?

According to reports coming out of the Hollywood conference, the 168-member RNC seems to have concluded that the party's problem is not with their positions . . . it's with the manner in which they *broadcast* or *express* those positions. During their four-day get-together, they refused to face up to the central problem facing their party: that their stance on issues such as marriage, reproductive rights and President Obama's healthcare plan are diametrically at odds with some of the very voters they are trying to win over. Fascinatingly, many of those attending the Hollywood conference rejected any suggestion that Republican positions in 2012 alienated voters in those key groups (single women, African-Americans, Hispanics, etc.) -- insisting that the party lost because Mitt Romney was a weak candidate. Instead of rethinking positions, they concluded, all they need is a change in perception.

In other words, fake sincerity.

The conference was addressed by a handful of Hispanic, African-American and Indian-American speakers, all of whom pledged to work hard convincing their various communities that the GOP stands with them. And yet, at the very moment its leaders were seeking to put a better, more inclusive, open-minded face on their party, House Republicans were doing what they do best: standing steadfastly against the 21st century.

On Thursday, Connecticut Democratic Representative Rosa DeLauro, the sponsor of the "Paycheck Fairness Act" filed a discharge petition. This petition would have immediately forced a vote on her bill -- which mandates that men and women doing the same jobs should receive the same pay -- if she could collect 218 signatures. Democrats also put forth a motion known as the "Previous Question," which would have enabled them to put the act up for a vote. However, virtually every single House Republican voted against the Previous Question; they killed the effort by a vote of 226 to 92.

Unbelievably, Representative Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.) said on the House Floor Thursday afternoon that DeLauro's bill is a "liberal plot" meant to perpetuate the narrative that Republicans are somehow anti-woman. DeLauro countered that she has yet to hear a reasonable excuse for Republicans to oppose the bill. **(n.b.** *Recent Census Bureau data shows that full-time working women make 77 cents for every dollar men make per year. The Paycheck Fairness Act, which DeLauro has introduced in eight consecutive Congresses, would expand the Equal Pay Act to close certain loopholes and allow employees to share salary information with their coworkers. It would also require employers to show that pay disparities between their male and female employees are related to job performance, not gender.*) But the Republicans, to a man -- and woman -- were against it.

At the same time, former Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum said on Fox News' "The O'Reilly Factor" that he thinks same-sex marriage discourages marriage between a man and a woman.

"Would we be discouraging heterosexual marriage by allowing gay marriage?" Bill O'Reilly asked Santorum.

"Yeah, I believe we would," Santorum replied.

Santorum then suggested that legalizing gay marriage results in Americans having fewer children.

"Because we'd be saying that marriage isn't about children," Santorum said. "And when we say that, then, of course, the consequences are you're probably

going to have less children. It's happening as we see it. It's already happening in America."

Are these the same Republicans who want to convince women and members of the LGBT community that they are in their corner, fighting the good fight along with them? Are they so blinded by ideology and fearful of drawing a primary opponent as to be incapable of seeing the great disconnect?

Apparently not.

Interviews with people attending the Hollywood conference revealed broad disagreement about exactly what changes are needed if they are to reverse the party's losing streak in national races. RNC Chairman Reince Priebus said his job was not to dictate policy but to create a granular, coast-to-coast operation — particularly in Latino and Asian American neighborhoods — to stem the party's steep losses.

Asked by a *Los Angeles Times* reporter what the party planned to say to those voters, Priebus said the next Republican presidential candidate would drive the policy discussion. "I'm not talking about changing the principle of our party, but I am trying to communicate that principle draped in grace and respect," Priebus said. "Generally we've done that. However, I know we've also had a few biologically stupid comments that were made in 2012 that helped, unfortunately, build a narrative and caricature that wasn't true. . . . It's not about what you say; it's how you said it."

No Mr. Priebus. It's not even about what you say . . . it's about what you do.

To be sincere or merely fake it: *that* is the question.

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**April 21, 2013**

## **AMATEURS WITH ANSWERS 'N MORONS WITH MICS**

**Question:** What separates Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Michael Savage, Ann Coulter *et al* and George Friedman, Sara DuBois, Robert D. Kaplan *et al*?

**Answer(s):**

1. The people in the first group are entertainers; media performers who will say just about anything that gives a boost to their Arbitron ratings; those in the second group are professional geopolitical strategists and consultants.
2. More often than not, the people in the first group have an ideological axe to grind; those in the second are research junkies whose personal political leanings are, for the most part, irrelevant.
3. When it comes to ferreting out, digesting and understanding intelligence, the first group is made up of rank amateurs; the second, of thoroughgoing professionals.



The horrific events of the past week -- both Boston and Texas -- have served to bring this distinction into sharp relief. Within hours of the explosions at the Boston Marathon finish line, the media bloviators were doing what they do best: pillorying President Obama for not immediately referring to the catastrophe as "an act of terrorism," and then excoriating presidential press secretary Jay Carney when he did. Additionally, Limbaugh and his fraternal (and sororal) compatriots immediately began predicting that the White House would ". . . inevitably blame the bombing on Tea Party patriots instead of Muslim terrorists." Moreover, once



the bombers were identified as Chechen brothers Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, these media mavens proclaimed them to be "sleepers," endlessly spoke of the need for more guns in the hands of more Americans, and proudly proclaimed that comprehensive immigration reform was D.O.A.

Amateurs with answers; morons with mics.

I find it fascinating that while amateurs like Limbaugh, Coulter, Savage *et al* speak in absolutes and bang the conspiracy drum, the professional intelligence-gatherers like Friedman, DuBois, Kaplan *et al* use conditional terminology. Consider the following:

On his April 16th broadcast, Michael Savage declared that the 22-year-old Saudi national who was tackled and arrested while fleeing from the site of the explosions, and who was then released and cleared of all suspicion, was "in fact an Al Qaeda operative dispatched to carry out a 9/11 style operation inside the US." What's more, Savage claimed the federal government was engaged in " . . . a conspiracy with Islamist forces to cover up the true identity of the bomber and place the blame on a more convenient target, perhaps a right-wing terrorist."

Compare this to global intelligence strategist George Friedman, who wrote, "There is *likely* only a small chance that the authorities will discover a formal link between the suspects and a state sponsor or a professional terrorist group such as al Qaeda or one of its franchise groups. . . .Any link will *likely* be ideological rather than operational, although *it is possible* that the two have attended some type of basic militant training abroad." (Emphasis added)

Friedman and other intelligence mavens have labeled the Tsarnaev brothers, like Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad, "[grassroots militants](#)" rather than full-fledged, internationally-connected terrorists. Despite describing both the Tsarnaevs and Shahzad as "amateurs," Friedman acknowledges that " . . . *such militants clearly still pose a significant threat.*" *According to intelligence chatter, the Boston case highlights analysis that "The jihadist threat now predominately stems from grassroots operatives who live in the West rather than teams of highly trained operatives sent to the United States from overseas, like the team that executed the 9/11 attacks. This demonstrates how the jihadist threat has diminished in severity but broadened in scope in recent years," a trend these experts expect to continue.*

Meanwhile, Limbaugh managed to tie the Boston bombing to 60's-era radical Bill Ayers . . . and thus, to President Obama: "*I don't want to make too big a deal out of this. Bill Ayers didn't blow up the Boston Marathon, but somebody like him did. Somebody like him did, and that could mean that whoever did this could someday be celebrated in this country if things don't change. Whoever did it could end up being on the faculty at Columbia University. Just last week Bill Ayers finally confirmed what*

*Obama has always denied. Obama has denied knowing Ayers other than as some casual acquaintance from the neighborhood."*

Ironically, the Boston Marathon bombing occurred at virtually the same time Senate Republicans backed by a small band of rural-state Democrats scuttled the most far-reaching gun control legislation in two decades on Wednesday, refusing to tighten background checks on firearms buyers or ban assault weapons. Without question, this vote was influenced far more by the National Rifle Association than *We the People* who, in poll after poll, have shown ourselves to be overwhelmingly in favor of background checks. And just as the NRA played a significant -- if not crucial -- role in the senate vote, so too did they play at least a tangential role in the Boston Marathon bombing.

How so?

The FBI and Boston P.D.'s initial inability to identify and track gun powders used in the bombs is due to a government policy -- strongly backed by the NRA -- to not put identifiers ("taggants") in gunpowder. Had there been taggants in the gunpowder, authorities could have quickly identified the explosives used to make the bombs, tracking them from manufacture to retail sale. Federal law does require taggants in the chemical and constituent ingredients used in the making of *plastic* explosives, but not gunpowder for the simple reason that the NRA doesn't lobby for the former. Way back in 1993, then-Representative Charles Schumer introduced legislation that would have forced manufacturers to add an identifying marker to explosives so their users could be tracked. At the time he introduced the legislation, he declared *"It is just amazing that in this dangerous time, fanatical, boneheaded people are opposed to controls on explosives."*

The "boneheads" to whom Schumer was referring? The NRA. And despite the fact that the technology already existed -- fluorescent particles that can be identified under ultraviolet light -- Congress voted it down. During hearings, representatives from the NRA talked up safety hazards and declared that the technology was unreliable. The use of markers, they said, made explosives more unstable and, when used in gunpowder, made the charge less reliable. Scientists easily disproved all the NRA-led objections. Nonetheless, the legislation failed.

God willing, one of these days the American people -- and their elected representatives -- will find the courage to stand up to the NRA and say "Enough! We refuse to accept your doomsday scenario. More guns and fewer regulations are not the answer!" The way in which the FBI, ATFE, Boston PD and all the residents of the nation's 7th largest city responded to this crisis shows American strength, courage, compassion and above all, resolve. We stand firm in the face of overwhelming tragedy.

So too, may the day come when we finally stand firm against the amateurs with answers and see them for what they are: morons with mics who will say anything, draw any conclusion, and broadcast any far-fetched inanity just for the sake of ratings.

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