

Thursday, July 14th, 2005
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR.
THE POLITICS OF ABORTION

The social conservative rallying cry has been consistent since *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973. Change the makeup of the Supreme Court, and take a major step toward their avowed goal of outlawing abortion. But now that such a scenario is possible, some pragmatic Republicans are worried that such a result could prove to be politically disastrous.

There's no stronger advocate in Washington for *Roe's* demise than Louisiana's own Toney Perkins, a former state legislator who heads up the Family Research Council, a leading national evangelical advocacy group. He is avowing that "a more conservative Supreme Court will reverse *Roe vs. Wade*, and then states will begin to enact more restrictions on abortion."

But could the resurgence of the abortion issue end up alienating a cross section of more moderate voters who have drifted to the Republican camp in recent elections?

Do practical, Republican politicians really want to change the status quo? What do strong, pro-choice Republicans, like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Rudy Giuliani, and George Pataki do if such a political shift takes place? Where do they go?

"Smart strategists inside the Republican Party don't want the status quo to change," says Tony Fabrizio, chief pollster for the 1996 Republican presidential campaign of Bob Dole. "If they did outlaw abortion, it would ultimately turn the Republican Party into a theocratic - based party, rather than an ideological party, and the party would necessarily start shedding people."

In Louisiana, political candidates for legislative and statewide offices have sidestepped this issue for years, telling voters that the whole question is out of their hands. The judges make the final call. But all of a sudden, the whole playing field could change. The same candidates would have to step up and take a position on how they would vote on a woman's right to choose. And let me tell you; few would relish such a change.

If a constitutional ban on abortions would benefit the GOP, then why hasn't there been a push by the party's majority leadership for such an amendment? As one republican congressional operative suggested, "If they thought it was a winning issue, they would have had a vote. If these guys are not careful, this could wind up being a case of getting what you wish for, and then regretting it."

Most polls show a majority of Americans believe the matter should be left up to a woman and her doctor. A recent survey conducted by the Wall Street Journal indicated that 55% of adults share this view. But with one new Justice about to be appointed, and a second vacancy a strong possibility, true believing pro-life Christian leaders smell blood. Any political considerations are secondary. But there is a major political downside that Republican insiders do not want to talk about publicly.

The question asked is whether the control of the law of the land for the next several decades is worth what could be huge political costs?

The Democrats, despite all their pontification, are sitting on the sidelines watching the show. Unless he picks candidates to the right of Attila the Hun, the President will end up with the judges he wants. Enough Democrats will defect, for their own political purposes, to hold off any filibuster. Look for Louisiana's own Senator Landrieu to join that group in the President's corner.

So it's Bush's game to lose. He could stumble, and make a real political mess for the next Republican who tries as to take his place. But for the time being, he does seem to hold all the marbles.

Back to Louisiana's own Toney Perkins. He has been vehement in his campaign to stop filibusters of judicial nominees by Senate Democrats. "Until the filibuster is broken, 'strict constructionists' will continue to be denied an up-or-down vote in the Senate." No doubt about where he and the Family Research Council stand. Right? Well...

Seven years ago, when Clinton was president and the Democrats controlled the Senate, apparently it was a different story. And here's what the then head of The Family Research Council had to say about Senate filibusters:

"The Senate is not a majoritarian institution, like the House of Representatives is. It is a deliberative body, and it's got a number of checks and balances built into our government. The filibuster is one of those checks in which a majority cannot just sheerly force its will, even if they have a majority of votes in some cases. That's why there are things like filibusters, and other things that give minorities in the Senate some power to slow things up, to hold things up, and let things be aired properly."

Toney Perkins is a personable fellow who seems to be quite effective in representing his following, which is significant. But give us a little consistency, Tony. I guess the answer is: That was then and this is now. Oh well.

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown