



On Birth Control, Young Republicans Get It

Two-thirds of young Republicans believe that every woman should have access to affordable birth control, 65 percent believe that insurance companies should cover contraception without co-pays and 51 percent believe that the federal government should continue to fund contraceptive services for low-income women.

Not exactly what you're hearing from Republican grown-ups. Especially some of those running for office.

In research by Kristen Soltis Anderson, a Republican strategist who studies the attitudes of young voters, in cooperation with the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 58 percent of the young people surveyed understand that it is cheaper to pay to prevent an unplanned pregnancy than to pay for the consequences of one.

A bit of connect-the-dots reasoning that seems to have escaped so many of their elders.

And two-thirds of these 18- to 24-year-olds recognize that access to birth control enables women to complete their educations and launch their careers.

"The data is in line with what I have long suspected," said Ms. Anderson, founder of Echelon Insights and herself a young Republican. She was selected by Time as one of "30 Under 30 Changing the World" in 2013.

"Young voters are more complicated than people give them credit for. They are Republicans. That means they are fiscally conservative and they believe in limited government. But they believe that birth control can have a very positive effect."

The young Republicans surveyed supported the Supreme Court decision allowing Hobby Lobby to opt out of providing birth control for its employees, she said, not because they dislike birth control or think it is immoral, but because they disapproved of the government's reach.

"They believe there should be a religious exemption [to the Affordable Care Act mandate]. They believe there should not be a government mandate without an extremely compelling reason. And they set a very high bar for that mandate."

Why is there such a disconnect between these young Republicans and their most conservative political leaders, who seem to want to conflate birth control and abortion so that a safe tool for family planning becomes an act of infanticide?

"They need to understand that being against birth control, or being perceived as against birth control, will put them at a political disadvantage with young voters, particularly young Republican voters," said Ms. Anderson, who believes Republican politicians often make the mistake of treating the issue of birth control as if it were the third rail.

"They are afraid to talk about it," she said. "They feel uncomfortable weighing in on the issue. Instead of being positive about birth control when asked, they feel like they are being led into a trap."

She points to the campaign of newly elected Sen. Cory Gardner of Colorado. He was being pummeled by incumbent Mark Udall for his position on birth control and was forced to repudiate his support for the state's "personhood" initiative, which would effectively ban certain forms of birth control. He also published this in an opinion piece in the Denver Post:

"[The Pill] is safe, reliable, effective, and presents very few risks or complications for the more than 10 million women who use it." He also called for its sale over the counter.

Just about every woman has used or will use a form of birth control at some point during her child-bearing years. There is widespread agreement that birth control is morally acceptable. And certainly its use in preventing an unintended pregnancy would dovetail with the call by so many for personal responsibility.

But birth control has become tangled in politics, primarily because of the ACA's mandate that employers provide it for free to their women employees. Many who dislike the Affordable Care Act — and a majority of young Republicans in this survey dislike it — chose to focus on this part of the law.

The result is that birth control — and a woman's ability to plan for pregnancy — is the subject of extreme political speech instead of a quiet discussion between a woman and her doctor, as it should be.