

# The New York Times

## Republicans Must Support Public Financing for Contraception

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TWO weeks ago, Gov. Bobby Jindal of Louisiana, a potential Republican presidential candidate in 2016, proposed making oral contraceptives available “over the counter.” This was a remarkable — and wholly positive — postelection development. It is just the sort of bold thinking the Republican Party needs to overcome its reputation for being unsympathetic to women’s concerns. (Last month, President Obama won the women’s vote by a margin of 10 percentage points.)

Making the party more appealing to women, however, should not — and need not — involve undermining the most basic Republican values. In the case of childbirth, the Republicans’ primary commitment is to the pro-life cause — and hence to reducing the number of abortions in the country. But abortion opponents should be pro-contraception, since making contraception as affordable and available as possible reduces the number of unwanted pregnancies and thus abortions.

In fact, historically, Republican lawmakers have voted to maintain or increase financing for the Title X Family Planning Program, which was enacted in 1970 under President Richard M. Nixon and currently provides about \$300 million a year to state and local organizations for contraceptive care for low-income women. According to a 2009 Congressional Research Service report, Title X prevents almost a million unwanted pregnancies each year.

But in 2011 and 2012, the Republican Study Committee, a caucus of conservatives in the House of Representatives, proposed defunding Title X. The reason? Twenty-five percent of Title X funds go to Planned Parenthood, which not only provides contraceptive care but noisily advocates for abortion rights. Though federal law prohibits the use of Title X funds for abortions, the close association between Planned Parenthood and the abortion-rights movement has discouraged Republicans from channeling funds to the

organization. This creates a serious public-relations problem for the Republicans. By trying to defund Planned Parenthood, Republicans can seem unsympathetic not just to abortion, but also to the plight of low-income and underinsured women who receive contraceptive care through the group’s clinics.

Throughout my career, I have worked with leaders of the pro-life movement. I have campaigned for Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, worked with the activist Phyllis Schlafly and for the conservative thinker Bill Kristol, as well as for Vice President Dick Cheney. In 1999, when Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani of New York City, who supports abortion rights, formed a committee to explore a Senate run, I sought and won special dispensation from my pro-life mentors. (He was planning a run against Hillary Rodham Clinton, then the first lady, so that was easy.) I now work with a champion of the conservative movement, John Ashcroft, a former senator from Missouri who was attorney general under President George W. Bush. While my pro-life credentials are in good order, I urge my fellow Republicans to rethink our approach to pro-life advocacy.

Like Mr. Jindal, I believe we need to empower women to avoid unplanned pregnancies. Encouraging abstinence among young women is positive and necessary, but not enough. Supporting Title X is critical to reducing unwanted pregnancies. Pro-life Republicans must strive to ensure that no woman finds herself pregnant because she cannot afford effective contraception, as these women will either have abortions or give birth under Medicaid coverage, which increases the burden on taxpayers.

Maintaining a federal role in contraceptive care for low-income women is a far more moral, empathetic and fiscally responsible approach to the problem of unwanted pregnancies than simply condemning abor-

tion — notwithstanding conservative principles of personal responsibility and limited government. If every woman who wanted reliable contraceptive care got it, irrespective of income, we should expect that abortion services would substantially decrease. This would not only reduce government spending on Medicaid — a dollar spent on contraceptive care is associated with a \$2 to \$6 reduction in health care costs — but, more important, avert the tragedy and anguish involved in abortion. And it would empower women to decide for themselves when they want to have children, advance their education or pursue career opportunities.

In the next round of budget proposals, the Republican-controlled House should take the opportunity to outflank President Obama and the Senate Democrats by proposing a budget that increases the baseline financing for Title X. At the same time, to make their pro-life position emphatically clear, they should vote on a

bill denying federal funds to any group that performs abortions. The moral and financial costs of restricting contraceptive access far outweigh conservative concerns motivating Republicans' recent opposition to Title X.

We pro-life advocates need to lead the Title X charge. Mr. Jindal's proposal for over-the-counter contraceptives is an excellent policy objective, but it is likely to take years of study before the Food and Drug Administration could clear such sales. In contrast, increasing Title X funding would be an immediate step that the Republican Party could take to reach out to women. Through promoting wider access to contraceptives in this way, Republicans would be making a tangible effort to reduce the number of abortions — which was our real goal all along.