

Pro-Lifers Vow to Keep Fighting the Good Fight

Democrats and liberal advocacy groups have declared victory in what they called a Republican “**war on women**” and are celebrating the pivotal defeats of some GOP candidates who took rigid stands against abortion.

However, the issues in dispute—notably access to contraception and **abortion**—are far from settled, and social conservatives are already girding for new confrontations.

“We’re going back to the drawing board,” **anti-abortion** leader Marjorie Dannenfelser told fellow conservatives at a post-election gathering.

Dannenfelser said her organization, the Susan B. Anthony List, would seek to back candidates who can argue against abortion “with compassion and love.” In an interview, she said Republican nominee **Mitt Romney** was too defensive on abortion-related issues and mentioned Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and Indiana Mike Pence as potential presidential candidates who intrigued her.

For activists supporting family-planning programs and access to abortion, the election produced a series of triumphs, starting with the re-election of **President Barack Obama**. Groups such as **Planned Parenthood** and the National Organization for Women campaigned vigorously for him, and he won about 55 percent of women’s votes.

“This is a resounding victory for women,” said Planned Parenthood’s president, Cecile Richards. “This election sends a powerful and unmistakable message ... that the American people do not want politicians to meddle in our personal medical decisions, and that politicians demean and dismiss women at their own peril.”

The differences between Obama and Romney on some “war on women” issues were stark. Obama vowed to require insurance companies to cover **birth control**, preserve federal funding for Planned Parenthood and protect access to abortion. Romney took opposing positions, and said he’d like to outlaw abortion except in cases of rape, incest and threat to the mother’s life.

According to exit polls conducted for The Associated Press and TV networks, 59 percent of voters said abortion should be legal either in all or most cases, while 36 percent said it should be illegal all or most of the time.

Planned Parenthood and its allies celebrated the outcomes of a host of specific races, including the defeats of two Tea Party-backed GOP Senate candidates whose chances plummeted after widely criticized remarks about rape and abortion. In Missouri, Todd Akin said women’s bodies have ways of avoiding pregnancy in instances of “legitimate rape,” while Indiana’s Richard Mourdock said pregnancy resulting from rape was “something God intended.”

Akin’s rival, Claire McCaskill, will be one of a record 20 women in the next Senate, 17 of them Democrats. Among them will be the first openly gay senator, Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin, and the first Asian-American woman, Hawaii’s Mazie Hirono.

In New Hampshire, wins by two Democrats in House races gives the state, which has two female senators, the first all-women delegation to Congress. It also has a newly elected woman as governor, Maggie Hassan.

Even though the abortion/contraception debate gained prominence during the campaign, exit polls indicated it wasn’t the paramount concern for many women worried about economic problems.

Elisabeth Jacobs, a fellow in governance studies at the

nonpartisan Brookings Institution think tank, suggested there was a connection between the two issues that perhaps cost the Republicans the election.

“It’s pretty clear that at the last minute, a lot of women made a decision that Obama really understood what their economic concerns were,” she said. “Yes, they want control over their own body ... but decisions over health care can limit their ability to control economics as well.”

She said conservative Republicans face a challenge: “How can you package the pro-life message in a way that speaks to women’s economic concerns? I don’t know how they do that.”

A conservative domestic policy specialist, Jennifer Marshall of the Heritage Foundation, said Republican candidates would be wise to broaden the scope of their **anti-abortion** message to convey interest in “the welfare of the mother and the community around her.” She said candidates willing to talk openly about abortion issues would be more agile at articulating their positions than those who shied away from the topic.

One complication for the Republicans was the party platform, which opposes abortion even in cases of rape and incest.

David Welch, a former GOP National Committee research director and campaign adviser to John McCain, blamed Tea Party activists for this hard line

“The Tea Party folks who’ve started this race to the bottom, of who can be more conservative, have really done the party damage,” Welch said. “We’ll always be a pro-life party, but we have to be compassionate about it.”

Going forward, anti-abortion activists and organizations will use a variety of strategies to pursue their cause under an Obama presidency.

At the state level, there will be continued efforts in Republican-controlled legislatures to enact laws restricting access to abortion.

"We refuse to relent simply because of the presidential outcome," said Mike Gonidakis, president of Ohio Right to Life. His group plans to push for defunding of Planned Parenthood and for additional preconditions before abortions can be performed.

Roman Catholic leaders, along with some conservative Protestants, say they will intensify legal challenges to the portion of Obama's health care overhaul that requires employers' health plans to cover contraception for their female employees. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops says this contraception mandate—which exempts houses of worship but applies to faith-affiliated employers—is a violation of **religious freedom**.

There's also the possibility of outright defiance.

The Rev. Frank Pavone, national director of Priests for Life, said the Obama administration and the Catholic Church "are on a collision course."

"It is therefore time to recommit ourselves to the basics: a clear proclamation of the truth ... and an unwavering commitment to civil disobedience," he said.

Some supporters of women's rights expressed regret that their cherished issues had become so entangled in political partisanship.

"It was not long ago that issues like fair pay, abortion rights, health reform, and family and medical leave had bipartisan support, said Debra Ness, president of the National Partnership for Women and Families. "We hope they will all have bipartisan support again very soon."

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