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Unmasking McCain: His Reactionary Record on Reproductive Rights



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We've seen the exit polls. We've read the unequivocal quotes. Many women who are avowed Hillary Clinton supporters are declaring they won't vote for Barack Obama in the fall.

I get the anger and the disappointment. But to quote *SNL's* Amy Poehler and Seth Meyers: *Really?* You'd rather vote for John McCain, a man who has a 25-year history of voting against a woman's right to choose? A man who over the last eight years that NARAL has released a pro-choice scorecard has [received a 0 percent rating](#) (in his time in office, Obama has [received a 100 percent rating](#))? A man whose [campaign website says](#) he believes Roe v. Wade "must be overturned"? A man who has vowed that, as president, he [will be](#) "a loyal and unswerving friend of the right to life movement"?

Really?

In Clinton vs. Obama, the policy differences were minor (hence the overriding focus on minutiae like flag pins, Bosnian sniper fire, and the real meaning of "bitter"). In McCain vs. Obama, the differences are enormous. Staying the course in Iraq vs. ending an unnecessary and immoral war. Universal health care vs. less regulation for insurance companies. Rolling back the Bush tax cuts vs. making them permanent.

And nowhere is the difference more profound than with reproductive rights.

For anyone -- male or female -- who cares about reproductive rights, family planning, and women's health issues, the choice this fall is not even close.

And yet many voters have no idea how extreme McCain's position on these issues is.

I was in Seattle last week giving a speech at a fundrasing lunch for [Votes! Washington](#), the political arm of Planned Parenthood in Washington State. At the event, the group's CEO Elaine Rose told me about a [poll that Planned Parenthood had commissioned of women in 16 battleground states](#) [pdf]. The results are

startling:

Over half of all women in these states have no idea what McCain's positions are on reproductive health. Forty-nine percent of women in battleground states who currently favor McCain are pro-choice. Twenty-three percent of them believe McCain agrees with them on choice.

The good news is, 36 percent of pro-choice McCain supporters are less likely to vote for him after learning that McCain opposes Roe v. Wade and favors making most abortions illegal. That number hits 38 percent when those voters learn that McCain has also consistently voted against expanding access to programs that reduce pregnancy and the need for abortion, consistently voted in favor of abstinence-only programs, and against legislation requiring insurance companies to cover birth control.

The poll's [encouraging conclusion](#):

The simple arithmetic of these findings suggests that just filling in McCain's actual voting record and his publicly stated positions on a handful of key issues has the potential to diminish his total vote share among battleground women voters by about 17 to 20 percentage points.

Clearly, when it comes to this key issue, the more voters learn about McCain, the less they like him. So let me add to the educational process:

Since 1983, in votes in the House and the Senate (where he has served since 1987), McCain has cast 130 votes on abortion and other reproductive-rights issues. [125 of those votes were anti-choice](#) [pdf]. Among his voting lowlights:

He has repeatedly voted to deny low-income women access to abortion care except in cases of rape, incest, or danger to the mother's life (although McCain is [now wavering](#) on trying to put these exceptions into the party platform).

He voted to shut down the Title X family-planning program, which provides millions of women with health care services ranging from birth control to breast cancer screenings.

He voted against legislation that established criminal and civil penalties for those who use threats and violence to keep women from gaining access to reproductive health clinics.

He voted to uphold the policy that bans overseas health clinics from receiving aid from America if they use their own funds to provide legal abortion services or even adopt a pro-choice position.

Of his anti-choice voting record, McCain [has said](#), "I have many, many votes and it's been consistent," proudly adding: "And I've got a consistent zero from NARAL" through the years. And last month he [told Chris Matthews](#): "The rights of the unborn is one of my most important values."

What's more, McCain has made it very clear that if he becomes president he will appoint judges in the Scalia, Roberts, Alito mold. His big [judicial speech earlier this month](#) was [filled with](#) coded buzz words that [make it clear that](#), if given the chance, he'd replace 88-year-old Justice John Paul Stevens with an anti-choice Justice who would tip the scales against Roe v Wade. Throw in an additional anti-choice

replacement for the 75-year-old Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and you can kiss the right to choose good-bye for a long, long time.

That's why the unmasking of John McCain is job Number One between now and November.

The only way John McCain can win is if his reactionary views on choice and women's health issues remain obscured by his faux maverick reputation and the blinding disappointment of Clinton die-hards.

There is too much at stake to let that happen.