

DAVID REITER

Abortion politics frustrating

Opponents of abortion from both political parties have ample reason for frustration.

Republican politicians are embroiled in a debate over whether to retain the party's stand against abortion, while Democratic politicians fail to recognize the basis in their own party for an anti-abortion stand.

The Republicans are caught up in the "big tent" controversy, generated by two factors.

The first is a desire to make the party attractive to a broad range of people. Before his death, Republican National Committee Chairman Lee Atwater expressed this desire by comparing the party to a big tent.

The second factor is the highly controversial nature of the abortion issue. The 1988 Republican Party platform was opposed to abortion and advocated a human-life amendment to the Constitution.

Groups such as the National Republican Coalition for Choice now are calling for the party to drop its official opposition to abortion. They claim that many will defect from the party if it does not drop this stand. Conservative groups aim to defend the party's traditional anti-abortion position.

Republican Party leaders are saying that the party will not change its position, but they are also stressing that pro-choice advocates are welcome. Vice President Dan Quayle recently told The Washington Post that although the party has a position on abortion, "those who disagree with us should not feel excluded because of that issue."

Presumably, the political pressure to change the party's stand will persist into the coming years, but Republicans should consider three points in connection with proposals to drop the party's anti-abortion stand.

First, pulling the anti-abortion stand could have deep repercussions for the overall party philosophy. The Republican Party exhibits a commitment to



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traditional family values. The sanctity of human life is an essential component of this package of values.

So, an important question is whether the party's commitment to traditional family values is deep or relatively superficial. If the commitment is deep, then eliminating the anti-abortion stand would seriously disrupt the overall integrity of the party philosophy.

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The third point concerns the rationality of the reasoning behind the call for changing the party platform. This reasoning goes as follows: For the party to accommodate people from

both sides of an issue, any stand favoring one side must be eliminated.

Consider a general application of this reasoning. If it is reasonable to broaden the platform on abortion, it is also reasonable to broaden it on every other issue. The results would obviously be self-destructive. Broadening the party platform by removing every plank leaves no platform.

This shows that the "big tent" metaphor is dangerous if taken as a mandate for perpetually broadening the platform. At a certain point it just breaks down. A "big tent" may be nice for camping, but a political party that accommodates every viewpoint is useless.

For Democrats opposed to abortion, the situation is worse. Their party also exhibits confusion on abortion, except in this case the confusion is well entrenched in the established party position.

The Democratic Party is committed to the pro-choice view, but this commitment runs counter to another fundamental commitment of the party.

Democrats traditionally call on the government to defend and assist disadvantaged groups. This tradition provides a logical basis for a Democratic anti-abortion stand. All that is needed is to recognize that any group subjected to the practice of abortion is outrageously disadvantaged.

Unfortunately, it seems that the Democratic leaders are incapable of making this recognition. Instead, they are committed to the axiom that personal freedom takes precedence over unborn human life. Their commitment to this axiom effectively blocks them from recognizing the disadvantaged status of the unborn.

The politics of abortion display considerable confusion. For political observers opposed to abortion, this confusion is frustrating. For the unborn, it is lethal.

Reiter is a graduate student in philosophy and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Residence hall telephone policy unfair to student

Being a long distance from home means a large phone bill for many students. I am from the Washington, D.C., area and I call home quite often. Last month, I had a very large phone bill. To try to lower this bill I thought I would get an AT&T calling card and use some of AT&T's other services.

After three lengthy phone calls with an AT&T representative, two calls to the university operator and a visit to the university telecommunications office, I learned that the university has a monopoly over the long-distance phone service to students living on campus.

Students cannot subscribe to long-distance companies and their services. Students have the choice of either using, as an AT&T representative put it, "University Bell," or taking the walk downstairs to the pay phone in the lobby.


Students pay enough housing fees to give them the choice of long-distance carriers. Students should be treated as adults and be given the choice of who their long-distance carrier is going to be. Currently, the Federal Communications Commission is working on legislation to prevent blocking of long-distance carriers. Write to the FCC and say you support Docket 90-313. You should also include a note with your next phone bill payment telling the university that you want a choice over your long-distance carrier.

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general studies

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