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## Some Abortion Foes Shifting Focus From Ban to Reduction

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By Jacqueline L. Salmon  
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Frustrated by the failure to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a growing number of antiabortion pastors, conservative academics and activists are setting aside efforts to outlaw abortion and instead are focusing on building social programs and developing other assistance for pregnant women to reduce the number of abortions.

Some of the activists are actually working with abortion rights advocates to push for legislation in Congress that would provide pregnant women with health care, child care and money for education -- services that could encourage them to continue their pregnancies.

Their efforts, they said, reflect the political reality that legal challenges to abortion rights will not be successful, especially after [Barack Obama](#)'s victory this month in the presidential election and the defeat of several ballot measures that would have restricted access to abortions. Although the activists insist that they are not retreating from their belief that abortion is immoral and should be outlawed, they argue that a more practical alternative is to try to reduce abortions through other means.

"If one strategy has failed and failed over decades, and you have empirical information that tells how you can honor life and encourage women to make that choice by meeting real needs that are existing and tangible, why not do that?" said Douglas W. Kmiec, a law professor at [Pepperdine University](#) who served in the Reagan and [George H.W. Bush](#) administrations. Kmiec, a Catholic who opposes abortion, was criticized by some abortion foes because he endorsed Obama.

Obama supports abortion rights and is unlikely to appoint justices who would overturn the controversial Supreme Court decision that allowed the practice. But during the campaign, he spoke of wanting to reduce abortions and of finding "common ground" in the debate.

The new effort is causing a fissure in the antiabortion movement, with traditional groups viewing the activists as traitors to their cause. Leaders worry that the approach could gain traction with a more liberal Congress and president, although they do not expect it to weaken hard-core opposition.

"It's a sellout, as far as we are concerned," said Joe Scheidler, founder of the Pro-Life Action League. "We don't think it's really genuine. You don't have to have a lot of social programs to cut down on abortions."

The diverse group that has come together to try a different tack includes prominent pastors such as Joel Hunter; Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference; Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good; Sojourners, a progressive evangelical organization; and RealAbortionSolutions.org, a coalition of Catholics and evangelical leaders.

Others include Catholics United, a progressive Catholic lay group; [Richard Cizik](#), vice president for governmental affairs of the [National Association of Evangelicals](#); the Rev. Thomas Reese of [Georgetown University's Woodstock Theological Center](#), a prominent Jesuit thinker; and Nicholas Cafardi, former dean of the Duquesne University School of Law and a Catholic canon lawyer.

Their actions have not come without consequences. Cafardi resigned from the board of Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio after writing a column supporting Obama and declaring the abortion battle lost. Kmiec has received hate e-mail, and a priest denied him Communion in April. And Denver Archbishop Charles J. Chaput has criticized Kmiec and several of the groups involved, saying they have "undermined the progress pro-lifers have made and provided an excuse for some Catholics to abandon the abortion issue."

The activists say the time has come for more cooperation on difficult social and moral issues such as abortion.

"We are not compromising our values, but at the same time we are finding a way we can all accomplish our agenda, or at least a piece of our agenda, together," said Hunter, pastor of Northland in Longwood, Fla., one of the nation's largest churches, and a board member of the National Association of Evangelicals. "There's got to be a way we can take some of these hot-button issues and cooperate, rather than simply keep fighting and becoming gridlocked in this hostility of the culture wars."

The activists are beginning with ad campaigns to raise their profile, advocating legislation and planning rallies. They say they hope to harness the two-thirds of Americans who want a "middle ground" on abortion, according to a 2006 survey by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

Some are working with Third Way, an abortion rights think tank, to build political support among Democratic lawmakers.

Even if *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, many in the coalition say, the battle would return to the states. And that is no guarantee that abortion would be outlawed.

Overturning the Supreme Court decision "is not going to dramatically reduce

the number of abortions in America," said Third Way spokeswoman Rachel Laser. "So here is a whole other way that promises to be very productive in terms of their goals, which is reducing the number of abortions, and that also serves the purpose of healing the divide and reasoning together."

A study sponsored by Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good cited recent research that found that the abortion rate among women living below the poverty line is more than four times that of women above 300 percent of the poverty level. The authors of the study found that social and economic supports, such as benefits for pregnant women and mothers and economic assistance to low-income families, have contributed significantly to reducing abortions in the United States over the past two decades.

"Clearly, poverty impacts the abortion rate," said Alexia Kelley, the group's executive director.

But established abortion opponents dispute that approach. [Cardinal Francis George](#) of Chicago, president of the [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#), said last week during a meeting of the conference that social-service spending is no substitute for legal protections for the unborn. He also questioned research showing that improvements in areas such as employment and health care can reduce the likelihood that a woman will want to end her pregnancy. "It's still to be proven what the connection is between poverty and abortion," he said.

Undeterred by critics, the activists are pushing for the passage of legislation that would increase funding for social services for pregnant women, such as low-cost health care and day care; provide grants at colleges for pregnant women and new mothers' education; and set up maternity group homes. Two House bills with backing from various groups are the Pregnant Women's Support Act, sponsored by [Rep. Lincoln Davis \(D-Tenn.\)](#), and the Reducing the Need for Abortion and Supporting Parents Act, sponsored by Reps. [Rosa DeLauro](#) (D-Conn.) and [Tim Ryan](#) (D-Ohio), who oppose abortion.

Those bills are largely opposed by antiabortion groups. "You don't work to limit the murder of innocent victims," said Judie Brown, president of the American Life League. "You work to stop it."

To preserve the coalition, activists have avoided taking positions on the more sensitive aspects of the issue, such as laws that restrict abortions, contraception, sex education and abstinence-only programs.

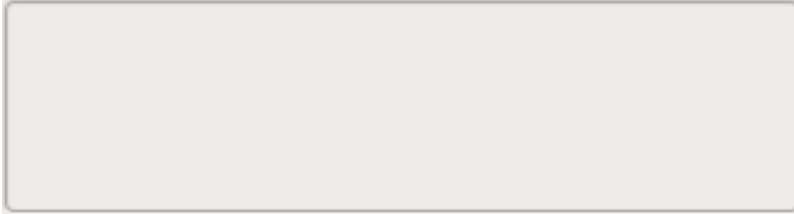
"There are certain things that we probably all can support, and then there are other things that we're going to disagree about, and you find common ground on what you can, and then you have a political battle on your other issues," said [Jim Wallis](#), president of Sojourners.

*Staff writer Michelle Boorstein contributed to this report.*

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