PS for 8/9/90

David Souter Ducks Media Abortion Bias

Both sides in the abortion debate, as well as the activist media, are beside themselves with frustration that they haven't been able to find out which side Supreme Court nominee David Souter is on. He gives every indication that he intends to carry off his Silent Cal (as in Coolidge) New England responses. President Bush said he doesn't know the answer and didn't ask his appointee.

To those who deem abortion to be the watershed issue of our time, this mystery seems unreasonable. To passionate activists on both sides, what could be more important than how the Justice will rule when **Roe v. Wade** comes before the Court again?

The chief reason we have to go through this guessing game is that President Bush has better things to do than to battle the outrageous bias of the media on the abortion issue. The proof of this bias is now available in the liberal press because some reporters are belatedly admitting to a guilty conscience about it.

The definitive documentation of media bias in favor of abortion and against those opposed to abortion is contained in an extraordinary series of four very lengthy articles in the **Los Angeles Times** in July. The titles of the articles are descriptive: "Abortion Bias Seeps into News," "Abortion Foes Stereotyped, Some in the Media Believe," "Rally for Life Coverage Evokes an Editor's Anger," and "Abortion Hype Pervades Media After Webster Case."

The series admitted that most major newspapers editorially support abortion, and two major media studies have been shown that 80 to 90 percent of journalists personally favor abortion. Some reporters have participated in pro-abortion rallies, and the American Newspaper Guild has officially endorsed abortion.

The news media consistently use language, pictures, images and graphics that frame the debate in terms that favor abortion. News stories repeatedly use the term "choice" as a euphemism for abortion, but almost never mention the world "life."

Television networks use the biological symbol for female as a backdrop for stories, but never a drawing of a fetus. When **Time** and **Newsweek** do a cover story on abortion, the cover always pictures a woman and never a fetus.

Abortion stories are always framed in terms of the woman's rights, without ever any concession that the unborn baby might have any rights. Legislation to recognize some rights for the baby are always characterized as "harsh" or "stringent" or "restrictive," whereas abortion opponents would characterize them as benevolent toward the unborn baby; in fact, the media won't refer to an unborn baby at all; it's always just a fetus.

Abortion opponents are usually described in disparaging terms such as "militant" or "strident"; abortion advocates are not described that way. Abortion opponents are frequently labeled Catholics, fundamentalists, or conservatives even though this is not relevant to the news story; abortion opponents are never labeled atheists, non-churchgoers, or liberals.

Even 17 years after **Roe v. Wade**, major newspapers and networks misrepresent the law by suggesting that abortion is legal only in the fist "trimester." In fact, a woman can have an abortion throughout nine months of pregnancy so long as she asserts that it is for the preservation of her (vaguely-defined) "health."

The media constantly misstate public opinion poll results, and never report them with the caveat that they were commissioned by media sponsors which are pro-abortion.

More prominent coverage is given to pro-abortion rallies and electoral and legislative victories than to anti-abortion rallies and victories. When pro-abortionists demonstrated in Washington in April 1989, the **Washington Post** gave it a dozen stories, more than 15 columns of space, treating it on the front page as the leading story of the day. But when pro-lifers held a much larger rally in April 1990, the **Post** gave it only a one-column story on page 3 of the B section.

Newspapers and writers usually sensitive to First Amendment rights and civil liberties ignore these questions when they involve opponents of abortion. Newspapers which passionately argue that the RICO act, which was designed for use against the Mafia, was wrongly used against Wall Street criminals, have ignored the use of RICO against anti-abortion demonstrators.

The media paid no attention to the rather sensational discovery last year by Bob Woodward of the **Washington Post** that two Supreme Court Justices who played a major role in the **Roe v. Wade** decision had conceded in private memos that they knew were "legislating policy and exceeding [the Court's] authority." Why?

According to Woodward, people in the media agree with abortion “and don’t want to look at how the sausage was made.”

The bias is most evident in reporting on elections. Victories of pro-abortion candidates are big front-page news and grist for editorial writers, while the sensational anti-abortion victories in Pennsylvania, for example, received almost no national coverage.