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## The Year of the (Pro-Life) Woman

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WHEN President George W. Bush signed the bill banning partial-birth abortion in 2003, [supportive legislators gathered around for a photograph](#). All of them were men. Nancy Pelosi, then the House minority leader, called the image “a slap in the face to women across America.”

My fellow pro-lifers winced at the picture — both because it offered Ms. Pelosi a political opportunity and because it reflected an enduring political weakness of our movement. American women are just as likely to be pro-life as American men, but few pro-life women have gone into politics.

The Gallup organization [recently concluded](#) that “abortion polling since the mid-1970s finds few remarkable distinctions between men’s and women’s views on the legality of abortion.” It has found that 48 percent of American women consider themselves pro-life, while 45 percent consider themselves pro-choice.

There are many millions of pro-life women, but there are only 13 in the House. The Senate has no pro-life women. Even Kay Bailey Hutchison, the Texas Republican who votes with pro-lifers on many issues, says she favors Roe v. Wade. All of the women who have served on the Supreme Court have supported Roe, too.

Pro-life women have not even found representation among Republican first ladies, all of whom in the post-Roe era have been pro-choice. One reason that Sarah Palin’s nomination for vice president in 2008 was so immediately polarizing is that she instantly became the most prominent pro-life woman American politics has ever produced.

Sarah Palin is about to get some company. Two pro-life women won Republican nominations for the Senate this week. A Tea Party favorite, Sharron Angle, and the former Hewlett-Packard chief executive Carly Fiorina are running for the Senate from Nevada and California, respectively.

A third pro-life woman, Susana Martinez, became the party’s nominee for governor of New Mexico, and a fourth, Nikki Haley, a South Carolina state legislator, is expected to be a gubernatorial nominee in her state. If they win their primaries, Kelly Ayotte, the former attorney general of New Hampshire, and Jane Norton, the former lieutenant governor of Colorado, will also be pro-life Senate candidates in November.

None of these candidates is a single-issue pro-lifer. But these women have not been shy about discussing the issue, either. Neither Ms. Fiorina nor Ms. Haley would have been likely to get Ms. Palin’s endorsement — valuable in a Republican primary — without firmly opposing abortion. Likewise, Ms. Angle would not have been able to unite populist conservatives and beat the party establishment’s candidate had she been pro-choice.

The number of pro-life women running for office has increased, perhaps paradoxically, because of the social changes of the last few decades. The first generation of women to become active in politics strongly identified as feminist and considered abortion rights central to their feminism. Pro-life women were more likely to be full-time homemakers. Their invisibility on the public stage contributed to an impression that the vast majority of women were pro-choice.

These days socially conservative women are likely to have careers, too. The growing number of Americans who consider themselves pro-life suggests that fewer people, of either sex, consider access to abortion to be crucial to women's economic success. The pro-life stance generally wins Republicans votes in general elections, because pro-lifers are more likely to vote on the issue than pro-choicers are.

That advantage is likely to be more pronounced for pro-life women running for office. Kellyanne Conway, a Republican pollster, says that her surveys have found that voters respond more positively to the pro-life message when it comes from women. Pro-life women won't be suspected, or credibly accused, of opposing abortion because they want to keep women in their place; they can therefore talk about the issue less defensively than male pro-lifers sometimes do.

Pro-life women can also soften the message: Ms. Fiorina [has said](#), "I myself was not able to have children of my own, and so I know what a precious gift life is." It's hard to imagine a male politician making that comment. These women will make it easier for pro-lifers to discuss the issue in the terms we want to discuss it: as a plea for justice for a vulnerable group.

Some of these pro-life women are bound to win their elections, and that will surely change the tenor of the national conversation about abortion. For instance, previous abortion debates in the Senate have pitted Ms. Boxer against Rick Santorum, the former senator from Pennsylvania. Next time the gender divide won't be so stark.

Political journalists called 1992 "the year of the woman" because so many female candidates won Senate seats that year — including Barbara Boxer, who was elevated from the House. All those women supported abortion rights. "We have been waiting for our 1992," says Marjorie Dannenfelser, the president of the Susan B. Anthony List, which encourages pro-life women to run for Congress. Her wait is coming to an end.

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