

# Sound Doctrine Revisited

*James L. Buckley*

**T**HERE IS ALWAYS A DANGER in inviting a former member of Congress to address present issues of public policy. The danger is a tendency toward retrospective nostalgia: to speak of what used to be rather than what is at hand; and the past tends to be magnified by the passage of time. The dragons we slew are more monstrous in memory; the molehills we moved have become mountains in the retelling.

Fortunately for you, when I was in the Senate I proved so far in advance of my times that the voters of New York chose not to re-elect me, so I was unable to tend and cultivate all the legislative seeds I had sown—although some of them, such as tax indexation and regulatory reform, were taken over by others and are now written into law.

But six years in the legislative arena did give me insights into the dynamics of democratic societies—or at least American society—that convince me that in God’s good time we too shall overcome. As in the case of volcanic regions, the surface may appear calm and unchangeable for decades on end while subterranean pressures build up that ultimately erupt with a force that transforms the social landscape for all time.

So it was over the long years in which the great civil rights crusade against racial discrimination gathered strength. The American people came to understand the inherently intolerable nature of the “separate but equal” standard sanctioned by the Supreme Court to justify segregated education. And when the court finally reversed itself, the seismic shocks spread across the continent and brought the remaining barriers tumbling down.

So will it ultimately be with our crusade as more and more Americans come to understand the realities of abortion; as more and more of them are forced to acknowledge what they already intuitively know: that such antiseptic phrases as “terminate a pregnancy” and “freedom of choice”

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are nothing more than euphemisms for the deliberate destruction not of potential life, but of a living and biologically unique human being that is capable of pain before it leaves the sanctuary of the womb. I make reference to biology because I have always thought it important to defuse the idea that abortion is at heart a religious issue: a misconception which the pro-abortionists have played to their advantage. Religion forbids the taking of an innocent life. It is biology that informs us when that life begins. And it is the increasingly graphic evidence of the realities of life within the womb that will ultimately win the day.

When sufficient numbers of Americans are no longer able to hide from the biological facts of human development, there will arise an irresistible demand to reverse the carnage unleashed by *Roe v. Wade*; and one way or another, whether by judicial action, or constitutional amendment, or legislative restraints, it too will be reversed.

That the pro-life cause is gaining strength is no longer in doubt. When some members of Congress attempted to restrict federal funding of abortion back in the 1970s, we could expect a decisive margin against us in the Senate. It was only the adamance of a narrow pro-life majority in the House of Representatives that kept us going, gave us leverage, and eked out compromises year by year. The best we could do, it seemed, was to put cosmetic restrictions upon federal funding of the taking of a child's life, so that both sides could claim victory.

But things did not turn out that way. In this, as in so many battles, final victory belongs to the determined, to those who are not smart enough to know their case is hopeless. Persistence pays, and more and more we are beginning to see tiny but significant gains toward a more distant goal.

I look back this way so that we can see more clearly ahead. I realize that, to all who are still working to secure constitutional protection for children before birth, our current situation is full of frustration. How long must we continue this work, year after year: the same old letter-writing, organizing, fund raising, marching, lobbying, educating, praying? The answer today is the same as it was twelve years ago, when even a halt to federal funding of abortions was beyond our reach. The answer still is: as long as it takes.

Twelve years ago, in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*, I introduced a constitutional amendment to overturn that ruling. My warning at the time has been amply justified by subsequent

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events. If I may repeat what I said on the floor of the United States Senate on May 31, 1973:

(The) court not only contravened the express will of every state legislature in the country; it not only removed every vestige of legal protection hitherto enjoyed by the child in the mother's womb; but it reached its result through a curious and confusing chain of reasoning that, logically extended, could apply with equal force to the genetically deficient infant, or the retarded child, or the insane or senile adult.

In 1973, most thought that view alarmist. Today, it is fact. The grisly consequences of what the Supreme Court did in *Roe v. Wade* are all about us: in Bloomington, Indiana, where retardation amounted to a death sentence by willful starvation for a baby boy; in California, where a young man would have died from neglect had there not been a public outcry—God bless George Will for leading it—an outcry to demand he receive the necessary surgery; and, most recently, in New Jersey, where the state Supreme Court has declared routine intravenous feeding to be unnecessary for terminally ill patients.

Everything we feared in 1973 is already upon us, and with it has come a tide of abortion that embarrasses even those who defend it. The more than 1,500,000 abortions a year are a multi-billion dollar business, probably the least regulated industry in America, operating entirely under the protection of the Supreme Court.

Twelve years ago, I was under no illusions about the task we were undertaking in attempting to undo the court's incredible decision. We did not fool ourselves. We knew it would not be easily or quickly accomplished. What we did *not* know—what we have discovered since then—is that the pro-life enterprise, launched in shock and outrage against the greatest odds, would have so large an impact on the American political system.

We did not anticipate how opponents of abortion—defenders of children, really—would create one of the most amazing grass roots movements since abolitionism. We did not anticipate how this issue would shatter long-established patterns of political allegiance, how it would wrench millions from their partisan moorings, how it would encourage millions more to participate in our electoral system.

I certainly did not anticipate how the question of abortion would radically change both major parties in this country. In my most partisan moments, I did not expect the leadership of the Democratic Party to

allow that venerable institution to become the vehicle for what are euphemistically called “abortion rights.” Nor did I expect the Republican Party, with its own divergence on this issue, to be transformed, willingly or not, into something of an anti-abortion vehicle. Indeed, to be fair to all my Democratic friends, it should be noted that some of the most determined pro-abortion leadership in the Congress still comes from the Republican ranks. But despite that, it is more and more clear that the Republican Party *has* been transformed by the abortion issue.

In the tumultuous sixties, it was faddish to speak of participatory democracy. Legislators tinkered with voting laws and party rules to try to entice more citizens into personal participation in our political system, with little real effect. But the abortion issue has energized our political life. It has given vast numbers of citizens the impetus for doing things they had never done before: canvassing, volunteering for campaigns, turning out for caucuses and primaries, lobbying, picketing, learning about legislative procedures, and even running for office themselves.

That, certainly, we did not expect back in 1973, when the prevailing wisdom was that pro-life sentiment would gradually flicker out under the moral darkness of our new, judicially-imposed reality. And I want to take this opportunity to say to pro-lifers that their incredible determination over twelve years has been both a lesson and an inspiration for many in public life.

When they lost, their ranks grew. When they won, their ranks grew, and they kept at it. When they were scorned as “single-issue people,” their ranks grew and they wielded that single issue more forcefully than ever; and thanks to their single-minded persistence, an awareness of the full implications of legalized abortion is slowly taking hold.

How easy it all seems now, when we hear the unborn championed in a presidential inaugural address and when, to the applause of most members present, the State of the Union Address calls for legislation to protect them. But it was not easy. It was—and it will still be—hellishly difficult to restore protection of the law to our people at all stages of human development: before birth, during senility, after incapacitation, and in lives retarded at birth. But how far we have come! And how noble the journey!

An important part of that progress came last year, when President Reagan advanced an international pro-life standard in the policy state-

ment prepared for the United Nations' Second Decennial Conference on Population, in Mexico City. That paper sparked international controversy and admirers and critics alike agree that it was a benchmark.

It was my honor to lead the U.S. delegation to that meeting, and that may have something to do with my being invited to speak here this evening. I am delighted to take up the subject, to clarify the record. For even in the often befuddling world of diplomacy, I know of few policy initiatives that have been so poorly reported as the U.S. position and its reception at the population conference.

I am sure you remember the media coverage of the matter. There were editorial cartoons portraying Mr. Reagan lecturing starving masses of Third World children on the merits of free enterprise. There were indignant editorials, in all the important papers that are usually indignant whenever Mr. Reagan does anything, decrying the "know-nothingism"—some called it the "Voodoo Demographics"—of his population policy.

We were reminded that the world is allegedly on the brink of a population Armageddon. We were told the world is running out of resources: that the planet is about to be overwhelmed in a sea of humanity. On the eve of the conference, Robert McNamara assured a national NBC audience that the American delegation would be laughed out of Mexico City. What the media later failed to report is that we emerged with some significant achievements.

As the result of our initiatives, the conference reaffirmed the primacy of parental rights in determining the size of individual families, condemned the use of coercion to achieve state-defined population objectives, and acknowledged that government is not the sole agency for the achievement of social objectives. Also, given the intensity of the attacks on the U.S. position on abortion, we took considerable satisfaction from the adoption, by a conference consensus, of an almost identical position: namely, that abortion "in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning."

Where we did not succeed, nor would it have been anything but romantic for us to think we could have succeeded, was in securing an explicit endorsement of the American proposition that the best way for developing nations to achieve the twin objectives of economic advancement and population stability would be through the adoption of freer, market-oriented economic policies as an alternative to the centralized

controls that have stultified the economies of so many countries of the developing world. To have succeeded would have required that a significant number of delegations acknowledge the responsibility of their own governments for much of the misery experienced by their people.

Nevertheless, raising the issue of economic policy enabled us to cite the compelling historical linkage between rising income and declining birth rates, and to draw on the examples of such developing countries as Singapore, South Korea, Colombia, and Botswana to demonstrate the linkage between economic freedom and economic growth. And we were not laughed out of town for having made the attempt.

Few historical correlations are so clear as the impact of economic well-being on the number of children couples will choose to have. In Western Europe today, the principal demographic concern is not over a surge in numbers, but over the problems associated with aging populations in societies in which birth rates have fallen below replacement levels. Quite clearly, family planning programs address only half the population equation.

As the U.N. Fund for Population Activities itself acknowledges, "It has been clear for a long time that family planning campaigns are largely ineffectual in producing a lower rate of population growth." The Fund concludes that "while family planning programs . . . will help couples to have the number of children they wish, other economic and social factors lie behind their ideas of desired family size." On the record, rising income is the most important of those factors. So much for the charge of "Voodoo Demographics."

At the conference we were also able, through the sheer mobilization of statistics, to pierce the Malthusian gloom with which so many wanted the proceedings to be wrapped. We were able to demonstrate, for example, that over the last thirty years, the birth rates in the developing world had fallen more than halfway toward the goal of population stability, that human life expectancy had dramatically increased, that caloric intake had improved, literacy soared, disease diminished, and *per capita* income grown substantially. At the same time, we helped focus on those nations—particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and portions of the Indian subcontinent—that had not shared in this undoubted progress, and therefore required particular attention. Although these tender rays of sunshine were not universally welcomed, they did help illuminate the true dimen-

sions of the problems that remain to be resolved, and place them in the unhysterical perspective that is essential to intelligent analysis.

In retrospect, this is not a bad track record for what the American press almost unanimously predicted would be an American disaster. But the myths about Mexico City persist, so let me dispel a few of them.

First, there is the curious accusation that Ronald Reagan deliberately used the Mexico City conference as a political ploy to win support from pro-lifers for his re-election. Now, as I recall, the President's re-election effort was not in any immediate danger at the time, to put it mildly. He was, moreover, already a hero to pro-life voters, who did not have to be reminded, through the Mexico City Conference, of his steadfast opposition to abortion.

But beyond that, can anyone imagine *this* president plotting the exploitation of an international conference—*any* international meeting—for a brief spurt of popularity here at home? I am not saying that Mr. Reagan is naive about these things, only that he is above them.

A second myth about Mexico City is that the U.S. stand on population issues was an abrupt reversal of all previous policy, a repudiation of everything our government had done to date. I have been amazed by the mindless repetition of that assertion both by journalists and by public officials who have not taken the time to read the policy paper upon which they comment. That paper explicitly reaffirmed continuing U.S. support for non-coercive family planning programs in developing nations. It did not propose to end them, or even to cut them back. But it did put them into a fresh context, a reasoned context.

The American position rejected the doomsday analysis that has served to justify any measure to control population however abhorrent, and proposed instead to focus U.S. funding on programs that, in Ronald Reagan's words, are "truly voluntary, cognizant of the rights and responsibilities of individuals and families, and respectful of religious and cultural values."

The U.S. policy was also an expression of confidence in mankind's continued ability to meet new challenges in a responsible way; and in this we were not alone. As Mexico's President de la Madrid stated when he addressed the conference: "Our planet, inhabited today by 4.8 billion human beings, has the natural resources, production capacity, and different administrative and political skills it needs to fully meet the basic needs of its future population."

A third misconception is that our government—and I as it representative—was blindly insisting that population growth poses no problems, and that a conversion to market economics would bring about instant relief for all the world's ills. That distortion of our message is directly contradicted by the policy paper that guided us. Its initial paragraph declared: "It is sufficiently evident that the current exponential growth in global population cannot continue indefinitely. There is no question of the ultimate need to achieve a condition of population equilibrium. The differences that do exist concern the choice of strategies and methods for achieving the goal."

At the conference itself, we fully acknowledged that "the current situation in many developing countries is such that relief from population pressures cannot be achieved overnight, even under optimal economic policies." At the same time, however, we noted that "slowing population growth is not a panacea. Without sound and comprehensive development policies, it cannot in itself solve problems of hunger, unemployment, crowding, or potential social disorder."

The same can be said of the impact of population pressures on the environment; and here I speak with some feeling (and I think knowledge) as one who has had a life-long concern for conservation and who, during his Senate term, exercised considerable leadership in the environmental field. Under anyone's scenario, we can anticipate a significant increase in the world's population well into the next century. We cannot defer imperative measures to protect the environment and the world's renewable resources pending the achievement of population equilibrium. The work to arrest soil erosion, protect forests, and preserve watersheds cannot be postponed. With intelligence and the necessary will, we can deal with these problems without imposing draconian measures under the guise of population control. Moreover, the greater the economic well-being of the societies in question, the greater their capacity to manage their environmental problems.

The fact is that population growth has been the most convenient excuse for the dismal failure of bad economic theories and practices over much of the world. State-controlled economies in underdeveloped nations have performed as poorly as state-controlled economies always do, in any circumstances. And the governments of those countries, with encourage-



ment from many in the West, have made their own people the scapegoats.

And so, at Mexico, we rejected the “economic statism” that has inhibited development in so much of the Third World and, in the process, disrupted the natural mechanism for slowing population growth. Our position in this regard was hardly the triumph of ideology over science. It was their conjuncture in common sense.

That leads me to another myth about Mexico City: the report that the U.S. delegation was isolated because it was out of step with the rest of the world. Untrue, as my summary of conference accomplishments has demonstrated.

I grant you that Mr. Reagan’s approach to population problems may have isolated the U.S. delegation from those professional population planners, both in the U.S. and elsewhere, whose careers have been based on Malthusian blinders that require a limit to population at whatever moral cost. And there is no doubt that the tightened controls imposed on the allocation of U.S. family planning funds worried past recipients who funded abortions or resorted to coercion to achieve population goals. The new measures, however, merely tightened restraints already in place—a closing of loopholes, if you will. And if one of the major family planning organizations has refused to accept that condition of eligibility, then it has at last come out of the closet, so to speak, and revealed what many had suspected all along.

It is revealing that this subject of abortion, to which were devoted only a few lines in the President’s policy paper, became the focal point of media attention to our participation in Mexico City. By raising the subject of abortion, we were told, the U.S. delegation would disrupt the conference. We would be repudiated by the world community. We would be viewed as attempting to impose our own morality upon others.

The actual results were more benign. The assembled delegates from every continent included in their final recommendations to the world community a statement that was unambiguous in its rejection of abortion.

First, a word of explanation. The original draft from which the delegates were working had language calling upon governments to protect women from *illegal* abortion. We all know what that means. It is a way of advocating legalization of abortion without quite saying so.

Let me read you the text of that portion of Recommendation 18 as the

delegates finally approved it: "Governments are urged . . . to take appropriate steps to help women *avoid abortion*, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning, and whenever possible, to provide for the humane treatment and counselling of women who have had recourse to abortion." What a transformation!

As if to make perfectly clear that the conference had taken quite an unexpected stand on this subject, the Swedish delegation complained about the change in wording. It preferred the original language, which had referred only to "illegal" abortion. And the Swedes explicitly registered their dissent from the implications of the final text, going on record to insist that abortion must remain legal and universally accessible.

A final myth about Mexico City is that the consequences of President Reagan's population policy would be devastating. Because the U.S. would no longer contribute to organizations involved in abortion with their own resources, family planning programs would collapse around the globe.

This myth proved to be the most ludicrous of all. Faced with the Presidential ultimatum—dissociate from abortion or do without U.S. funding—most population groups quickly complied. After all, if they meant what they often said—that no one really likes abortion—then it would not hamper their activities to ensure that none of their resources are devoted to its performance or advocacy.

The International Planned Parenthood Federation did not see things that way. To its directors, its involvement with abortion was more important than the millions of dollars they annually received from U.S. taxpayers. So be it. That is their choice. After all, the money is not going to sit in a vault somewhere within the State Department. It will be re-deployed to other family planning organizations and programs around the world.

The net result is that President Reagan effectively established a norm of decency for all international family planning efforts in any way associated with U.S. tax dollars. We do not purport to change abortion laws in other countries; we haven't yet managed to do that here at home. But we will not contribute to organizations abroad that are involved in that practice.

All of which brings me to an unexpected side effect of the controversy surrounding our work in Mexico City: namely, the tremendous media attention it drew. It made many take more seriously President Reagan's pro-life commitment. That may be why his recent endorsement of Dr. Bernard Nathanson's film, "The Silent Scream," has become national

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news. Following the President's example, much of official Washington has viewed the film, with its sonogram photos of an abortion process; and thanks to television, so has much of the nation.

How long did we try to get pictorial coverage of abortion on television? How long have we tried to make people see—not just hear about—the victims of abortion? It was as if the networks had covered the war in Vietnam all those years without showing the wounded, the maimed, the dead, the dismembered.

It may be too much to hope that we have reached a watershed in media coverage of the abortion issue, and that the pro-life cause—or even the simple facts of fetal development—will be given more extensive publicity.

But there is general agreement that the news coverage of the annual March for Life, last January 22, *was* much improved from past years. Even the major pro-abortion newspapers finally accepted the park police estimate of the crowd, instead of coming up with their own much smaller numbers. That sounds like a little thing, but on this issue, it's a real media breakthrough!

Perhaps it was the extraordinary juxtaposition of the 1985 March for Life with the cancelled inaugural parade, scheduled for the day before, that demanded fair play in the press. After all, one day after America's most important procession down Pennsylvania Avenue had to be cancelled because of the most bitter cold in Washington's memory, some 70,000 pro-lifers trekked down the same street, as they have done every year since *Roe v. Wade*.

As always, they demonstrated the diversity that has been the strength of the pro-life movement and that accounts for its endurance and growth. The elderly and the students walked, while others steered their wheelchairs over the patches of ice. A group of rabbis smiled back at the pro-abortion heckler who screamed at them that he wished *they* had all been aborted.

There were the evangelicals who have learned to combine the power of prayer with the force of the ballot, the gospel choir and the folk singers, the regulars and the newcomers.

There were members of what I understand is the fastest-growing pro-life group, WEBA (Women Exploited by Abortion), whose personal tes-

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timony in defense of women and their infants has cornered the abortion profiteers in their dens.

I purport to speak *for* none of them, though I used to speak *to* them, from the steps of the Capitol, when I was a member of the Senate. And yet, I venture to say that most of the marchers this year feel as I do: that their goal, so distant for so long, as impossible a dream as Don Quixote ever envisioned, is now quite possible and perhaps nearer than we dare to think.

I do not know whether it will be achieved by legislation or a transformed federal judiciary. One way or another, as we have said all along, we will win the fight we began twelve years ago.

When that finally happens, when the Constitution and our laws again protect the unborn from slaughter, the aged from euthanasia, and the infirm from extermination, I am sure there will be one last march down Pennsylvania Avenue. But this time, it will be a victory parade.

Perhaps because I now live in Europe as president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, I am reminded of another dramatic march. Many of you are too young to remember how, after the liberation of Paris from the Nazis, Charles de Gaulle led, it seemed, virtually everyone in Paris down the Champs Elysees. They marched to celebrate the rebirth of the City of Light after years of savage brutality. They marched to let the world know that Western civilization had endured and was resurgent.

And so do I look confidently ahead to the day when we will have one last march down Pennsylvania Avenue, celebrating the liberation of our country, not from an alien army, but from alien ideas, ideas foreign to our Judeo-Christian culture and hostile to the ethical underpinnings of Western civilization. Those ideas have already claimed victims by the millions, sacrificed to the notion that life is not sacred, that the quality of life determines the right to it.

And just as liberated Paris became a symbol and an incitement to those who still fought on, in other lands, against the old barbarism, so will the liberation of our country from the barbarity of abortion inspire women and men around the world in their crusade for life.