

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** National Women's Law Center & YWCA  
**From:** David Iannelli, Public Strategies  
**Subject:** Reproductive Health Care Poll of Republicans & Independents  
**Date:** January 16, 2009

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*Public Strategies conducted a national survey of 1,000 self-identified Republican and Independent voters, September 30-October 8, 2008 on behalf of the National Women's Law Center and the YWCA. The purpose of the survey was to gauge their attitudes and opinions on various reproductive health care issues, including comprehensive sex education, contraception, emergency contraception/Plan B and abortion.*

*The sample is comprised of 558 Republicans (422 strong Republicans and 136 weak Republicans) and 442 Independents (269 straight Independents and 153 Independent Republicans).*

### OVERVIEW

Some of the survey's key findings will be noteworthy to lawmakers, as they run counter to long-held assumptions about Republican opinions on the issue of reproductive health care.

### KEY FINDINGS

Republicans, and to an even greater degree Independents, support a range of legislative proposals to make contraception more affordable and accessible. Republicans and Independents also indicate strong support for comprehensive sex education, particularly as compared to abstinence-only programs. Support for selected reproductive health care goals and priorities extends to more conservative "strong" Republicans as well as more moderate Republicans and Independents.

What opposition does exist is not monolithic and tends to split into two different camps:

- "Passive" opponents who simply do not want government involvement. These opponents tend to be older men.
- "Active" opponents who advocate restricting access in some cases. These tend to be ideological conservatives.

Despite these minorities, however, the results of this survey demonstrated clearly that Republicans – even those that self-identify as conservatives – and Independents strongly support a range of public policy proposals related to reproductive health care.

## ISSUE-BY-ISSUE

### *Contraception:*

**Strong support exists for more affordable and available contraception.**

1. Majorities of our Republican/Independent sample strongly favor the following contraceptive-related legislative initiatives:
  - ➡ Legislation that would protect the right of all individuals to get contraception without government intrusion (78% favor, 15% oppose)
    - Republicans: 73% favor, 18% oppose
    - Independents: 84% favor, 11% oppose
  - ➡ Legislation that would make it easier for people at all income levels to obtain contraception (72% favor, 21% oppose)
    - Republicans: 65% favor, 28% oppose
    - Independents: 81% favor, 13% oppose
  - ➡ Legislation that would help make birth control more affordable (70% favor, 23% oppose)
    - Republicans: 64% favor, 28% oppose
    - Independents: 77% favor, 16% oppose

More than 60% of fundamentalist/evangelical Protestants favor each of these three proposals.

2. A 64% majority of our Republican/Independent sample, including 60% of Republicans and 68% of Independents, would like to see government *provide more information* about contraception rather than *play no role* (33%), while only 2% want to *restrict access to contraception*. Also, those who identify themselves as pro-life favor the government providing information on contraception by 58%-37%.
3. Nearly half of Republicans (49%) have a favorable opinion of emergency contraception, while 40% express an unfavorable opinion. Among Independents, 67% have a favorable opinion, while 22% have an unfavorable opinion.

### *Comprehensive Sex Education:*

**Strong support exists for comprehensive sex education among Independents and Republicans, including the more conservative “strong” Republican segment.**

4. More than two-thirds of our Republican/Independent sample overall (68%), including 62% of Republicans and 76% of Independents, believe the government should support comprehensive sex education programs that include information about abstinence as well as information about contraception to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases:
  - One-in-five overall (21%) think the government should play no role.
  - Only 8% think the government should support abstinence-only sex education.
5. A 69% majority overall, including 60% of Republicans and 81% of Independents, think that public schools should teach comprehensive sex education:
  - Just 22% of Republicans and 10% of Independents do not believe schools should teach sex education.
  - While supporters of abstinence tend to be partisan conservatives, those opposed to teaching sex education tend to be older men.
  - “Strong” Republicans prefer comprehensive sex education over abstinence-only by a 56%-14% margin.
6. Two-thirds overall (67%), including 59% of Republicans and 77% of Independents, prefer a hypothetical Senate candidate who favors teaching comprehensive sex education in public schools over a hypothetical Senate candidate who favors teaching abstinence only.
7. An overwhelming 86% overall, including 86% of Republicans and 87% of Independents, say it's reasonable to require that any sex education taught in schools, whether it be abstinence-only or comprehensive, be complete and medically accurate.
8. Our Republican/Independent sample thinks comprehensive sex education is effective (rather than ineffective) by a 41-point margin. Conversely, respondents overall think abstinence-only sex education is ineffective by a 16-point margin (40% effective, 56% ineffective).

***Pharmacy Refusal:***

9. Overall, 51% *strongly* favor legislation that requires pharmacies to ensure that patients get contraception at their pharmacy of choice, even if a particular pharmacist has a moral objection to contraceptives and refuses to provide it. That includes 42% of Republicans and 62% of Independents. “Strong” Republicans favor such legislation by a 55%-36% margin.

***Abortion:***

10. Asked what role government should play on the issue of abortion, only 20% overall (25% of Republicans and 14% of Independents) want to see the government restrict abortion, while 30% want the government to play no role, and the plurality (47%) want to see it play an educational role.