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Author

McHugh, Kathleen

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THE WOW: POLICIES OR CATERPILLARS?



How do we know when there is a war? We have had the war on poverty, the war on drugs, the war on terror, but technically Vietnam was not a war. So now there is a charge of a war on women. These “wars” are rhetorical tactics focused on framing policy and political conflicts in moral terms. Those declaring the war point to a number of recent policies, proposed or enacted, by Republicans:

- Proposed changes in Georgia rape laws would change the designation of the rape “victim” to rape “accuser.” (This legislation refers only to rape – victims of assault, burglary, and murder remain victims)
- Proposed law that would allow federally funded hospitals to refuse to perform emergency abortions, even if a woman’s *life* is at stake
- Enacted legislation that changes legal abortion limit from viability, 24–28 weeks, to 18–20 weeks, before medical results can be obtained concerning fetal impair-

ment or significant health risks to the mother. Omits earlier legal exceptions that permitted abortion based on the woman’s health, grievous sexual trauma resulting in pregnancy (rape, incest) or fetal abnormalities

- Actual or proposed defunding of Planned Parenthood for non-abortion related services, like screens for cervical and breast cancer, family planning information and contraception
- Repeal in Wisconsin of strong anti-discrimination employment laws

RNC Chair Reince Priebus rebutted the interpretation of these actions as a “war,” saying: “Well, for one thing, if the Democrats said we had a war on caterpillars, and mainstream media outlet talked about the fact that Republicans have a war on caterpillars, then we have problems with caterpillars. The fact of the matter is it’s a fiction and this started a war against the Vatican that this president pursued. He still hasn’t answered Archbishop Dolan’s issues with Obama world and

Obamacare, so I think that’s the first issue.”

In the first instance, Democrats draw a conclusion based on the outcomes for women of a series of actions. Priebus counters by invoking the specter of the liberal mainstream media. Democrats focus on actions, and how they can be labeled; Priebus focuses *only* on the language – “the war on women” – ignoring the actions to which they refer. All else is “fiction.” But then he uses his own labeling (Obama world, Obamacare) without any evidence.

Let’s simply look at what is being proposed. Beneath the language, let’s look at the actual policies that will structure day-to-day life for women. It may not be war, but it is devastating public policy and legislation. Or maybe it is war, since, as Clausewitz noted, “war is the continuation of politics [or policy, depending on how you translate politik] by other means.”

– Kathleen McHugh