



CONNECTOR

Genuine?

FALSE?

TRUE?

FACT?

not true?

Authentic?

FAKE?

Real?

Romney's Conversion on Abortion—Is it Authentic?

By J.C. Willke, MD

The conversion of a political candidate prior to an election is naturally met with questions and even skepticism. Mitt Romney has been no exception. It has led even the casual observer to say, "Is this authentic?"

In History

To fully understand why this can be true, we must first review some history. Pro-life conversions have happened in the past at the highest levels of politics. Central to this was President H. W. Bush. As a vice presidential candidate, George Bush changed his position from pro-abortion to pro-life after a lengthy meeting with me.

My relationship with George H. W. Bush, who was to eventually become president, began in August 1980. Mr. Bush and Ronald Reagan had run against each other in the Republican primary. Reagan won that race and was nominated for president at the Republican National Convention in Detroit. During the primary campaign, it was evident the two men did not see eye-to-eye on several issues. Most of us had the distinct impression that while Ronald Reagan was quite pro-life, George Bush was not.

At the convention, Reagan—prob-

ably for political reasons—chose George H. W. Bush as his vice presidential running mate. This came as quite a surprise to us, and immediately presented a problem. I had just been elected president of the National Right to Life Committee. We very much wanted to have our people support the Reagan ticket, but now it was complicated because his running mate seemed to be pro-abortion. I decided to see what I could do to change the situation.

On the last day of the convention, I took an elevator in the Pontchartrain Hotel up to the 14th floor, which was Republican headquarters, and knocked on the door. I explained who I was and asked to talk to Mr. Bush. The young lady answering the door seemed somewhat taken aback as I explained that this was important for the upcoming election.

A few minutes later she came back and said, "Mr. Casey will be seeing you." Bill Casey later became head of the Central Intelligence Agency, and I would become well acquainted with him. We sat and talked for a bit. Mr. Casey was quite sympathetic to our issue, and said that he would arrange for me to meet Mr. Bush.

After about 30 minutes, I was ushered into what obviously had been a committee meeting room. The smoke still hung

heavy, and there were a number of folding tables, some with empty drink glasses and cups. Mr. Bush got up from his chair and came over, shook my hand, and we sat down alone in the room. I explained who I was and that we supported Ronald Reagan's pro-life stand. We wanted to support the ticket, but there seemed to be some real question about his position on our issue. Due to that uncertainty, I didn't know whether pro-life people would support the ticket.

Mr. Bush thanked me for my straightforward comments and said, "Let me tell you where I stand." I held up my hand, interrupted and said, "Please don't. I think perhaps if I could brief you on this entire issue, then you could think this over and I might possibly change some of your thinking. I would like to give you a professional briefing."

Mr. Bush relaxed, sat back, smiled and said, "I think that is a good idea, Doctor." He fished for his business card and said, "We are all taking some time off now, but when we get back to Washington, call. I'll have (he mentioned her name) set you up with an appointment." I said, "I would like to be very respectful here, sir, but that won't be sufficient." "Oh," he looked at me. "To do this right would take

the better part of three or four hours and that is what I'd like to request from you." He almost swallowed his teeth. "Four hours?" I interrupted and said, "Of course I would like to change your opinion and make you pro-life. I am probably not going to do that. But if I can report in our *National Right to Life News* that you were so interested in this issue and so respectful of it that you gave me this kind of time, that is going to make a profound impression on our people." He sat back, mulling this over for a bit. Then he said, "You're pretty convincing."

He paused again, then said, "Okay . . . look, I am going back to Kennebunkport, which is our home in Maine, umm . . . let me carve out a time up there and umm . . . here is the person you want to talk to, we'll set you up there for a morning meeting. Will you come alone?" I said, "I would probably bring one lady with me." "That's fine," he said, "I will have one of my aides with me. We will meet at my home." "Fine, Mr. Bush, we'll meet in the morning. My presentation will be medical and scientific with moral overtones. Would you mind then, perhaps after lunch, if I could bring a few other more political people with me? Then we could discuss the campaign." Another long pause and he said, "All right, let's do it."

Several weeks later, I found myself entering the Bush home with my Political Action Committee director, Sandra Faucher. I had brought my trusty Kodak carousel

projector and some literature. It was a very pleasant day, which I have never forgotten. The house was on a small peninsula extending into the ocean, and on a bit of a rise. The French doors and windows were all open with a gentle ocean breeze wafting through. Barbara Bush was very gracious, serving iced tea and some snacks. I set my projector on a small coffee table. Mr. Bush was on one side and I on the other. The aide provided a screen and the briefing began. For about three hours, I would speak, then flip on a slide, then speak some more. Mr. Bush would question. I would answer. His aide spoke occasionally, as did Sandy, but basically it was a dialogue between the two of us.

Barbara Bush sat about 10 or 15 feet away, knitting. She only spoke once, asking "Well, what if the life of the mother is in danger?" I answered. She seemed to be satisfied and went back to her knitting.

Lunch was served and then the other pro-life leaders joined us. For another two hours that afternoon we all discussed the campaign. When it was time to go, I said, "Well Mr. Bush, back in Detroit you offered to tell me where you stand. Now I am going to ask you, would you be so kind as to answer?" He smiled, looking at me with an "Okay you did it" sort of look. He said, "I wasn't here before, but I am now. I will support an amendment to the Constitution to forbid abortion and to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, but it will be a states' rights amendment. I can't support a federal amendment."

When we publicized this news, the pro-life movement

strongly supported the Reagan-Bush ticket and the rest is history.

As of June 1988, Reagan and Bush had served two terms, a total of eight years. I was in the White House with some frequency during those years. Sometimes I met with President Reagan, sometimes with Vice President Bush, and occasionally both. My acquaintance with Mr. Bush grew during those years, and we worked together on several things.

After the Reagan administration, it was a pleasant four years with George H. W. Bush in the White House. We didn't get everything we wanted, but we got the important things. Every time we asked him to threaten a veto, he did. While we are still not sure that this good man is completely pro-life in his heart, he certainly was pro-life in his actions. He was a man of his word.

What does this mean for Romney?

As this is written, Barack Obama has proven to be the most pro-abortion president of modern times and he is now seeking a second term. Former Massachusetts Governor, Mitt Romney, is the presumptive nominee for the Republican Presidential slot in November. Naturally, some have questioned his pro-life credentials and convictions so let's examine the details of Governor Romney's conversion.

When he was first elected Governor of Massachusetts, it was generally presumed that his position was "pro-choice." However, about half way into his first term as governor in 2005, Romney announced that he was opposed to embryonic stem cell research and proceeded to veto a bill making the "Morning After," plan B contraceptive pills available. In the same year, he declared that he was pro-life.

Governor Romney tells us that he changed his mind in November 2004. At that time, he was obviously searching and had questions. He met with Douglas A. Melton, PhD, a scientist from the Harvard Stem Cell Institute on November 9. In that interview the Governor said this researcher told him, "Look, you don't have to think about this stem cell research as a moral issue because we kill the embryos after



fourteen days.” This had a major impact on Romney and his chief of staff, as they saw it recognizing that such embryonic stem cell research in fact was killing what they were convinced were human lives already in existence. Later, through a spokesperson, Dr. Melton disputed that he used the word “kill.”

But Governor Romney, wanting to know more, consulted with one of the best people available in February 2005. This expert was William B. Hurlbut, a physician and professor at Stanford University Medical Center Neuroscience Institute. Dr. Hurlbut is a dedicated pro-lifer.

The two of them met for several hours, discussing the issue in great detail. They went through the dynamics of conception, embryonic development and repercussions of the various research and experimentation that has been going on aimed at exploring the first weeks after fertilization. At that point, Romney was under intense pressure to change a state law that, at the time, still protected human embryos from lethal stem cell research. Some of the pressure came from Harvard, his own alma-mater. After this in-depth consultation, Romney stated that he was pro-life.

Asked about their meeting by columnist Kathleen Parker, Dr. Hurlbut said, “Several things about our conversation still stand out strongly in my mind. First, he clearly recognized the significance of the

nized that this was not a matter of purely abstract theory or merely pragmatic governance, but a crucial moment in how we are to regard nascent human life and the broader meaning of medicine in the service of life.”

Similar to my time with President H. W. Bush, Dr. Hurlbut presented Governor Romney with sound scientific

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- J.C. Willke, MD

and medical information. The Governor responded by changing his position to support the protection of innocent human life from the point of fertilization. He declared himself pro-life and has repeatedly done so since that time.

For over twenty years, Life Issues Institute has been solely dedicated to pro-life education. It has been my primary contribution to the pro-life movement since the 1960s. Our strength comes from the central fact that we are daily changing the hearts and minds of Americans on abortion. And our efforts have greatly been assisted by

organization should rejoice when anyone—political or otherwise—responds to the unmistakable fact that human life begins at fertilization and that it should be protected.

Life Issues Institute and I are confident that Governor Romney’s conversion is real, heartfelt and authentic. Since the Institute is a 501(c)(3) organization, we

cannot endorse a political candidate. As such, this article should not be construed as an endorsement of Governor Romney’s candidacy but rather a testament to the fact that we believe Mitt Romney is truly pro-life. 



issue, not just as a current controversy, but as a matter that would define the character of our culture way into the future. Second, it was obvious that he had put in a real effort to understand both the scientific prospects and the broader social implications. Finally, I was impressed by both his clarity of mind and sincerity of heart. He recog-

science. The tool of ultrasound has resulted in an entire generation having their first baby picture taken within the womb, and it’s greatly impacted people’s opinion on abortion. Every pro-life individual and



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