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Contraception PROTECTION

"A reproductive right"— a cliché phrase that stands for one of two general ideals: for abortion or against? Beyond the inherent problems in asking ourselves to choose between black and white, U.S. citizens must now deal with a new gray area emerging into the sphere of political discussion. Pro-death or promiscuity won't come into play here; the issue is not abortion but birth control.

For those of us who believed that a fight about hormone pills and condoms was a fad of the '70s, like disco and sequins, I am sad to report that it seems to be making a dramatic comeback. Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, the third-ranking Republican in our nation's senate, is pushing the envelope of privacy and basic rights in his opposition to contraception. Santorum is not just talking about abortion pills, he's talking about birth control pills. According to a recent Newsweek article, Santorum believes that each state should have the right to regulate contraception as it sees fit, meaning that Santorum would support, for instance, Oregon if it decided to ban the sale and use of any contraceptive. Coming from a high-ranking senator who has expressed wishes to run for president, this fact is certainly unsettling.

Also upsetting is the fact that Santorum has quietly, yet publicly, expressed his opposition most strongly to one form of pre-emptive birth control in particular: the pill. According to a quote from Santorum about his opposition to birth control pills in Prevention Magazine, he claims to be against insurers covering medication which "would lead to a fertilized egg not being implanted in the



AILEE SLATER
FURTHER FROM PERFECTION

uterus ... I would not support drugs that would prevent a conceived embryo (from being) implanted."

Of course, the error in Santorum's thinking is amusing as well as disturbing. I shudder to think how many politicians are making medically unsound decisions concerning the bodies of women. Birth control pills are designed to deliver certain hormones into a woman's body in order to trick her system into thinking that it is already pregnant, therefore preventing the release of an egg. For Santorum to claim that birth control pills could possibly stop an already fertilized egg from becoming a fetus demonstrates a complete lack of knowledge about an issue for which, as a policy-maker, he should be intimately acquainted with.

Likewise, emergency contraception manipulates hormones in the same manner, simply at a larger level. If conception has occurred, the "morning-after pill" will have absolutely no effect on this fertilized egg. The opposition to emergency contraception as killing life, from both Santorum as well as an increasing number of conservatives, is scientifically unfounded. The Justice Department recently published new guidelines for treating rape victims, which include no reference to emergency contraception as a method of

preventing pregnancy. Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union have already spoken out against this prominent omission; still, it is frightening to realize that it is the radicals rather than leaders of our country who are coming to the aid of women recovering from rape.

Of course, it is not just these methods of birth control coming under fire. Santorum has made no distinction between hormonal birth control and latex birth control and this fact, along with Bush's well-known support of abstinence-only education, points to a group of policy-makers amiable to the idea of condoms as a thing of the past. This particular group just happens to be in charge of The United States of America, meaning that without left-wingers asserting power, the legality of our little latex friends might be liable to go limp. And, at the point where condoms are being discussed, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS in relation to policies of contraception present even more concerns within backwards ideas on birth control.

It is just one senator from Pennsylvania, and it is just one former governor from Texas. Just one partial-birth abortion policy, just one emergency-contraception regulation. It is just one Justice Department. It may seem impossible, improbable and everything in between that birth control, just birth control, could ever be illegal. Let us hope that those running our nation will remember that human rights and women's rights have taken us this far; now is not the time to turn back the clock.

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■ Editorial

Columnist bribed to push Bush agenda

A black media pundit who is willing to denounce so-called "black groupthink" in support of conservative policies is worth his weight in Republican gold. Literally.

On Jan. 7, USA Today reported that the Bush administration paid (or more accurately bribed) syndicated columnist Armstrong Williams to produce positive press about the president's chief education reform legislation, No Child Left Behind. The payola scheme cost taxpayers \$240,000.

For his egregious ethical violation, Williams has lost his newspaper syndication contract with Tribune Media Services and most of his friends in the conservative media. The National Review's Jonah Goldberg had to sheepishly admit "that if Bill Clinton had gotten caught giving Joe Conason a quarter of a million dollars to be flogging their policies, guys like me would have smoke coming out of our ears, and the right would go crazy."

Even Williams himself, talking on CNN's "Crossfire" (or "Crosstalk" as it should be called), couldn't defend his own actions. "I used bad judgment. As a media pundit, people have to trust what I say. They have to believe in what I say. And they must believe that I'm saying it not because I'm being paid. ... I should be criticized, and I crossed some ethical lines. I've learned from this. It will never happen again."

Only the responsibility-phobic Bush administration seems unwilling to admit any wrongdoing. A Department of Education spokesperson insisted that the bribe was "a permissible use of taxpayer funds" that produced a "straightforward distribution of information." Even Bill Clinton eventually said he was sorry.

Williams should give the \$240,000 bribe back to the American people, and Congress should demand an investigation into the legality of the deal. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has already found the Bush administration guilty of illegally using taxpayer money on "covert propaganda" to promote their Medicare prescription drug plan. Video news segments were produced to look like the real thing. The government was never attributed as a source, thus violating federal law.

An opinion columnist taking money to write government propaganda is a horrendous violation of journalistic ethics. Even more disturbing is the Bush administration's attempt to deceive the public by presenting propaganda as fact. Why should people trust anything that the president or the media tells them? At this point, they probably shouldn't.

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CORRECTION

In the Emerald's article "ASUO leaders might not repay funds from trip," which published Jan. 6, the Emerald reported that the ASUO fall finance retreat took place Oct. 10-12. The retreat was Oct. 8-10. The Emerald regrets the error.

OREGON DAILY EMERALD LETTERS POLICY

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