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LETTERS AND COMMENTS

Like Sarah Palin, Early Feminists Were Pro-Life

By U.S. News Staff
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Jamie Stiehm's "[Sarah Palin Is No Friend of Women in Politics](#)" isn't the first time feminist history has been rewritten to fit the abortion-centered model, but it is one of the more egregious instances of ignoring current events. Her recent opinion cites the [2010 election](#) results as evidence of the alleged disservice Sarah Palin and pro-life groups like the Susan B. Anthony List (SBA List) have done women by decreasing the overall number of women taking office in 2011.

On one point she is right. 2011 will be the first time in 25 years the overall number of women taking office will not increase. But that doesn't mean the voice of women in governance is fading. The truth is that authentic female leadership is soaring. The kind of woman now able to serve in all levels of government has been dramatically widened beyond Stiehm's definition which has dominated the debate for too long.

In the House, the 112th [Congress](#) will see a 70 percent increase in the number of pro-life women representatives and a 16 percent decrease in the number of pro-abortion women. [Republican](#) Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire will fill the void of a pro-life woman's voice in the Senate. At the state level, we'll see a four-fold increase in the number of pro-life women governors.

This wave of pro-life women leaders swept into office seems to have pushed pro-abortion feminists like Stiehm into denial, causing them to ignore the trend and distort historical fact. At best, Stiehm is trying to spin the facts.

But, contrary to her claims that the early suffragettes were pro-abortion, the truth is that much of what we know about Susan B. Anthony points to a deeply-held and passionately expressed belief that the rights of women extend to her unborn children.

She left us many fiery and logical arguments against abortion in *The Revolution*, which acted as the official voice of the National Women Suffrage Association. Most would conclude that writings signed therein with an "A" were penned by Anthony. In one such piece, Anthony said of abortion:

No matter what the motive, love of ease, or a desire to save from suffering the unborn innocent, the woman is awfully guilty who commits the deed. It will burden her conscience in life, it will burden her soul in death; but oh, thrice guilty is he who... drove her to the desperation which impelled her to the crime! [*The Revolution*, 4(1):4 July 8, 1869]

The case that Susan B. Anthony was the founding mother of an abortion-centric feminism is a hard enough one to make, but stretches even thinner when extended to her compatriots.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton lamented in a personal letter, "When we consider that women are treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit." [Letter to Julia Ward Howe, October 16, 1873]

Victoria Woodhull, the first female presidential candidate, also told newspapers that "Every woman knows that if she were free, she would never bear an unwished-for child, nor think of murdering one before its birth." [Wheeling, West Virginia *Evening Standard*, November 17, 1875]

Likewise, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first female physician, said of Madame Restell, an early abortionist, in her personal diary,

"The gross perversion and destruction of motherhood by the abortionist filled me with indignation... That the honorable term 'female physician' should be exclusively applied to those women who carried on this shocking trade seemed to me a horror. It was an utter degradation of what might and should become a noble position for women." [1845]

Anthony and her colleagues considered their movement a fight for women and their unborn children. But modern feminists peddling Stiehm's narrative have preached that a woman's rights and her right to an abortion are somehow synonymous.

The recent shift back to the traditional roots of authentic Susan B. Anthony feminism empowers women through their ability to give life—even in the most difficult and unexpected circumstances. And that's probably what threatens feminists like Jamie Stiehm the most—the prospect that they will lose their monopoly over what defines a feminist to women, like Sarah Palin, who did their history homework.

This election did not ring in the "Year of Jamie Stiehm's Woman." Instead, it made 2010 the Year of the Pro-Life Woman and ushered in record numbers of pro-life leaders.

It's time for Stiehm to face facts.

Marjorie Dannenfelser is president of the Susan B. Anthony List, a nationwide organization dedicated to advancing, mobilizing and representing pro-life women in the political process.

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