

Lessons from the Potato Controversy

by Joe Naiman

Several states and territories, as well as a number of foreign countries, decided abortion issues in 1990. Some led to anti-abortion gains, some to abortion-rights gains, and some were vetoed by governors or otherwise not implemented.

Perhaps the abortion controversy which best provides advice on successful and poor strategies is the Potato Controversy of 1990; that is, the Idaho abortion bill. Analysis of the Potato Controversy of 1990 provides a few tips from both sides which are applicable to other issues.

For those who didn't follow the story, the Idaho legislature passed a bill which would prohibit most abortions performed in the state. The National Organization of Women threatened to boycott Idaho's biggest-selling product, potatoes, if Governor Andrus signed the bill. Anti-abortion groups responded by promising to buy more potato products. In the end, Governor Andrus, who is anti-abortion, vetoed the bill not due to its content or the threat of a boycott but as a response to outside interference urging him to sign the bill.

Thus the Potato Controversy involved victories (and losses) for both sides, and we can learn from the victories and losses of both.

If you're going to make a threat, you'd better follow up on it.

The potato boycotters may have outnumbered the new patrons, but the record of the abortion-rights activists caused questions about their abilities. They didn't patronize Ted Turner's baseball team that year, and while it may be true that watching the 1990 Atlanta Braves may have been worse than starving to death, threats require a proven track record - and one's future credibility is on the line with the effectiveness of the action and the support for it.

Factionalism and infighting can be the death-knell for your goals.

Unfortunately for the anti-abortion side, the Catholic Church was not the only religious institution active in supporting the bill. The religious orientation of anti-abortion activists hurts the anti-abortion movement, not because of the perceived threat to church-state separation, but because religious involvement has led to incompatible factions. Catholics don't even recognize Mormons (rather influential in Idaho) as Christians, fundamentalist Protestants believe Catholicism to be a cult, and Mormons don't believe anyone is saved until they convert to Mormonism. A combination of exclusion (of seculars and non-Christians) and divisiveness led to a "divide and conquer" situation for the abortion-rights side. The anti-abortion factions spent too much time fighting each other for the common good.

Titles aren't always ego-boosters; sometimes they can be impressive to outsiders.

Among the anti-abortion activists was the Roman Catholic Church, no surprise. The Catholic Church hierarchy goes from the Church (administered by the Pope) to the Diocese (usually a metropolitan area, and administered by a Bishop) to the Parish (individual church, administered by Monsignor or priest). An Archdiocese, administered by an Archbishop, is actually a large diocese. The Catholic Church in America has over 35 Archdioceses. While Idaho has only a Diocese and a Bishop, the Catholic Church stands to gain from the creation of an Archdiocese and an Archbishop in small areas. To the legislature, the Archbishop of Omaha not only sounds more impressive than the Bishop of Omaha, but makes it seem like the Catholic Church treats Nebraska with enough respect to have a higher-ranking clergyman running the Church. Had Boise been an archdiocese, there might have been a different result.

We have a sphere of influence;
stay within that sphere.

In the end, Governor Andrus decided not to be bullied by out-of-state interference. There's nothing wrong with helping brothers in other states, but let them be the contacts with their own legislators and governors. Their vote counts; ours doesn't, and if it looks like outside influences are stripping the state residents of their own power, it could actually backfire, as it did in Idaho. "Launder" your help through the actual fighters, not directly to the politicians who know you can't

do anything to them regardless of how they vote.

The potato boycott never came about, and both sides could claim victory in Idaho. It's better that we take advantage of the lessons learned by the abortion battlers than having them learn from our errors. Taking the tips learned from both sides of the issue won't endorse either side - but it will certainly help us.

Education Begins at Home

by Joe Naiman

An incident in November 1992, the week before election day, convinced me that I had made the right decision when I chose not to run for reelection to ABATE of California's Board of Directors.

I was in the process of dropping off my children when a V8 trike pulled up to the stoplight in the lane next to me. My one-year-old son looked at the trike. Cliff really loved that trike. The bearded gentleman riding it, his vision restricted by his helmet, may never know how much pleasure his machine gave my son.

There were two of us on the 1991 Board of Directors who did not return for 1992. I chose not to run for a fourth term and Steve Miller was unseated in the election. Steve and I have something else in common - we both became parents in 1991. Steve had a girl, his second child, and I had a boy, my first child.

ABATE of California can find other members to be on the Board of Directors, but my son, like Steve's daughter, will only have one daddy. Someone has to teach the children about motorcycles, and freedom, and everything else ABATE was formed to do. Our assignments are unique - nobody else will be able to educate our children the way we will, and we won't get another chance to raise our children.

The evangelist Billy Sunday was a well-

known temperance crusader. By the time of his death in 1931, America was in Prohibition, and Sunday probably kept thousands of others from alcohol voluntarily. But while Sunday was crusading across the country against alcohol, three of his four children were involved in substance abuse. It wasn't that Billy Sunday was a bad crusader - he didn't always crusade in the right places.

My family tree consists of a mix of automotive and motorcycle people, and of doctors, nurses, and safety crusaders. My father, a doctor, strongly believes in helmet laws and believes motorcycles are dangerous. His father owned a tire store. His mother was on the National Safety Council. My other grandfather, who passed away last year, rode an Indian in the 1920s and 1930s and worked for his brother-in-law's trucking company until he was 69. One of his daughters married my father, and one of his sons married a nurse, who calls motorcycles "murder cycles." His other daughter married a motorcyclist, and their son rides. There's no genetic pattern to which I could entrust Cliff's feelings about motorcycles.

Nor would it be wise to entrust our children to the television, or the public schools. Neither of these have been supportive of ABATE, and to attempt to persuade others while abandoning the teaching of our children is counterproductive.

Our colleagues in the family values department have criticized Hillary Clinton for supporting the choice of children to be raised in a manner they prefer, regardless of the wishes of the parents. At least Hillary gives the child some say, but the fact that government would think of nullifying parental input makes it imperative that we reach our children before government-run schools do.

I still let my elected officials know how I feel. Even parents have the responsibility of getting involved. But the Board of Directors meetings since I've left have proven that there are other good people who can serve on the board of directors. Nobody else can teach Clifford.

I missed the 1994 board meeting in San Diego for another reason. I wanted to drop by and take Clifford. I asked, "Cliff, do you want to see the motorcycles?" Cliff answered, "I want to ride a motorcycle by myself." I could see there might be a security problem if I took him to the ABATE meeting.

On the other hand, my mission had been accomplished. It was a loss for ABATE in the attendance area, but a gain in the much more important area of appreciation of motorcycles.

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