

ELECTION 2000

Gore

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common-sense steps should be taken to reduce the number of abortions by reducing the number of times women feel like they're in a situation of such anguish that they have to contemplate that choice," he said.

Gore added that the number of abortions has declined in the last eight years, and "that's a good thing."

Gore said his willingness to sign a law banning partial-birth abortion — provided it allows exceptions when the life or health of the mother is endangered — is one thing that should be considered by people who agree with him on most other issues but hesitate to vote for him because of his record of support for legal abortion.

Reminded that wording about protecting the health of the mother is an obstacle because the term "health" has been broadly interpreted, Gore said he's confident such a law can be phrased to satisfy most people.

"Some on both sides have invested in particular language and are willing to see the conflict continue rather than settle it," Gore said. "Several ways have been suggested that have been turned down because it's a symbolic issue. The issue itself can be solved, no question about that."

He said the people "out front on both sides of the issue" have not yet acknowledged "a growing, if begrudging, understanding across the divide" about the nation's abortion laws and policies.

"I think there's a deep desire for healing," he said, citing mutual efforts to promote abstinence and other efforts to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies. He added that such approaches "find faith-based organizations in partnership with public organizations."

He also said the Catholic Church in "many places in the developing world" has a partnership in which the church "attends to the promotion of right ethical choices and morality, and the secular organizations do talk about contraceptives."

"The agreement to disagree works in a way," he continued, "that is similar — at least where birth control is concerned — similar to St. Francis' prayer: Help me to change those things I can change, accept those things I cannot and the wisdom to know the difference."

As for the death penalty, Gore said he is not yet convinced that the way capital punishment is imposed at the federal level justifies a moratorium on its use.

A Justice Department report released several weeks earlier showed apparent inequities in who receives the death penalty under federal statutes. Gore said he agrees with Attorney General Janet Reno about the need for further study of the causes for such discrepancies.

However, he said, in states where evidence shows the death penalty is applied unevenly — such as seemed to be the case in Illinois, where Gov. George Ryan stopped executions earlier this year — a moratorium ought to be imposed.

"And if further investigation of the application of the death penalty at the federal level reveals a situation similar to that, then I would support a moratorium," he said.

Gore said a recent shift in public opinion supporting moratoriums reflects only public discomfort with how capital punishment is applied, not a change in basic public support for keeping capital punishment available.

He also said he supports legislation sponsored by Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., to require making DNA testing available in every possible capital case. And he said he encourages "renewed attention to evidence of inequality in the administration of justice, wherever it appears."

On another subject, Gore said although he does not believe tax money should be used for education voucher programs that include parochial schools, he thinks the federal government and religious institutions,



Reuters/CNS

Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Al Gore greets children in Sarasota, Fla., during a campaign stop Oct. 10.



Reuters/CNS

Supporters cheer Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Al Gore during a campaign rally in Detroit Oct. 14. Gore outlined his stand on issues of importance to Catholics during an interview with Catholic News Service following the rally.

including schools, can work together in many other ways.

"I strongly support the availability of Title I funding (for programs like remedial reading for children from low-income families) to parochial schools," he said "I also strongly support public charter schools to increase choice and competition. And those who bid for the management contracts for public charter schools can include all kinds of groups, so long as they agree to abide by the First Amendment and not use public funds for any religious purposes."

His opposition to voucher programs that bring tax money to parochial schools is based both on public schools' needs and a concern for protecting religious institutions from government interference, he said.

"Once public funds are used directly to support parochial schools, it would bring government mandates and interference in the curriculum and whatever else the majority wanted to impose," he said.

Ninety percent of the nation's children are in public schools, he said, noting that there are more school-age children than at any time in U.S. history and there are fewer voters with children in school than ever.

"As a consequence, there is a public school financing crisis all around America," he said. "All over America there's crowding in the classrooms. There is a shortage of teachers. There are dilapidated buildings. ...

"Communities that used to be able to rely on the parents of children in the schools to turn out in force to support local issues for higher school revenues

now find great difficulty in putting any more pressure on property taxes," he said.

He said he fears "a downward spiral" for public schools if taxpayer funding is diverted to parochial schools that do not have the same obligations of public accountability. And if such schools were held accountable, he said, they "would be subject to interference that's inappropriate between state and church."

But when it comes to federal collaboration with faith-based groups through programs like one at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, run by Jesuit Father Joe Hacula, Gore is an enthusiastic supporter.

"The success of partnerships between government and faith-based organizations has been stunning," he said. "I want to see it expanded in several areas where it can

really do more good than any other approach."

He said that would include opening an office for faith-based cooperation in the White House and including faith-based organizations "at the table when social challenges are discussed in a Gore-Lieberman White House."

Gore also said he wants to see a change in how immigrants, even illegal immigrants, are treated by the United States. Detention policies need to be changed, and a renewed emphasis on family reunification in immigration policies is needed, he added.

Gore said policies and procedures need change, particularly with regard to the U.S.-Mexico border in the Southwest, where changes in enforcement policies have led to dramatic problems for those crossing illegally and for U.S. residents and landowners.

"I think we have to change the procedures at our borders," he said. "Every human being who comes to our borders should be treated with respect and dignity."

He said he supports "no-nonsense enforcement" of laws against illegal immigration because the nation's tradition of welcoming legal immigrants can only continue "if we assert a right to control our borders and shores against destabilizing waves of illegal immigration."

He said he does not favor splitting apart the Immigration and Naturalization Service but wants to see money and personnel devoted to reducing backlogs of visa and naturalization applications.

"Several years ago, I made that a major focus of my reinventing government work, and we greatly reduced the time needed," he said. "And it was made into a political football by the majority in Congress."

To a final interview question, Gore, a one-time divinity student, said the Sermon on the Mount is his favorite Scripture passage.

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