

## **I'm pro-life. And I'm voting for Hillary. Here's why.**

July 31, 2016

<http://www.shannondingle.com/blog//im-pro-life-and-im-voting-for-hillary-heres-why>

I'm pro-life.

Because I'm pro-life, I won't vote for Donald Trump. Instead, I'm planning to vote for Hillary.

To many of my fellow pro-lifers, this seems confusing and inconsistent. I understand that. Hillary firmly believes women should have the right to abortion. In the earliest days of my blogging, I wrote that if I were to be a single issue voter, abortion would be that issue for me.

So what's changed?

Nothing.

Well, nothing in my stance toward abortion. I'm still opposed to it. But since *Roe v. Wade*, most Republicans have talked a lot about abortion while doing little to make meaningful change in that area of policy. Furthermore, they've opposed or even stalled measures that could prevent abortions by targeting the underlying causes, like poverty, education, lack of access to healthcare, and supports for single parent and low-income families. In fact, I suspect these reasons contribute to why abortion rates rose under Reagan, rose under the first Bush, dropped under Clinton, held steady under the second Bush, and have been dropping under Obama. As such, I'm not sure we can hold that voting Republican is the best thing for abortion rates in this country.

That's my nutshell answer, but I think this topic deserves a more detailed analysis. If you just want the summary, feel free to stop here. If you press on, please trust that I did my best to edit down my thoughts but you'll still be wading through a few thousand words. I wanted to offer a comprehensive, thoughtful, and well-researched presentation of my stance, and I've never been one for brevity.

So buckle up, y'all. We're in for a ride...

Why not Trump/Pence? Donald doesn't have a pro-life track record, even a little bit. On Meet the Press in 1999, Trump said, "Well, I'm very pro-choice" in response to a question about partial birth abortion. Later that year, he stated, "I believe it is a personal decision that should be left to the women and their doctors," to the Associated Press. "I support a woman's right to choose, but I am uncomfortable with the procedures," he wrote in his book *The America We Deserve* in 2000. Even more concerning, a few years later during an interview with shockjock Howard Stern, Trump talked about how his first response to Marla Maples' surprise pregnancy with one of his children was "what are we going to do about this?" In other words, he felt like he should have the right to consider abortion, so why believe now that he thinks other Americans shouldn't?

Yes, he chose Pence, which to some demonstrates that he'd choose pro-life judges too. But I think all it means is that he'll pick someone who will help him win pro-life votes. I believe both candidates are opportunistic (who in politics isn't?) but, in Donald's case, I'm convinced this shows up in his newly minted pro-life stance. He knows it's what's necessary to win conservative votes. Because he has no political track record, we can only go by his words, which are inconsistent, unreliable, and highly subject to change based on what's politically convenient for him.

Less than a year ago, in a remark that defies his supposed pro-life stances and also smacks of nepotism, he said he thought his sister would make a "phenomenal" Supreme Court justice. Nevermind that she, Maryanne Trump Barry, declared partial-birth abortion to be a constitutionally protected right in a decision she authored as an

appellate court judge. Even more recently, this past April, on Face the Nation, he said the laws on abortion are set and should stay as they are. Does this sound like a pro-life candidate, even on the topic of abortion?

(Lest I sound as if I'm ignoring Hillary's pro-choice record, I assure you I am not. I expect that anyone reading this is well-versed in her public statements over the years. I'm just pointing out, like this article does, that if you're looking for a genuinely anti-abortion candidate, then Trump isn't your guy any more than Hillary is your girl.)

But it's on the other pro-life issues that I find Trump the most lacking and Hillary the far superior candidate. In other words, my stance isn't a choice between the lesser of two evils. I'm not simply voting against Trump. If so, I'd be abstaining on principle (which is a valid choice, no matter what some may argue) or considering a third party candidate. I don't consider it morally appropriate to vote against someone; in my personal convictions, I must be able to vote for the person I choose on the ballot. So if I were a NeverTrumper and a NeverHillary, then I'd choose someone else or abstain. Those are viable options, even if someone tries to bully you into believing they aren't. But I find enough I can affirm and identify with in the positions and record of Hillary Clinton, so my stance to be with her isn't based in an opposition to Trump. Aside for abortion – which I do care about deeply – I see the Democrats as the party that champions other pro-life issues more effectively and consistently. This is why I changed my registration to unaffiliate with any party several years ago, after having been a Republican for years, based largely on my abortion stance.

What other pro-life issues? you ask. Well, if we call ourselves the pro-life movement, then we're not just anti-abortion, right? I spoke at the Evangelicals for Life conference in DC back in January, and plenty of the speakers addressed issues beyond abortion. I was one of them, talking about the lives of people with disabilities. Starting with that group, here are 10 ways in which I find the Democratic nominee more pro-life than the Republicans...

### **1. The lives of people with disabilities**

If you've ever read my blog before, you know this is a top issue for me. Even before I parented children with disabilities, I taught them in public school classrooms, became friends with many adults with disabilities, founded a robust inclusive special needs ministry at a large church, pioneered outreach events to provide respite care for their families, and found myself living with a minor degree of physical disability myself due to rheumatoid arthritis and a couple other chronic conditions. Now my husband and I are also raising six children, whose collective diagnoses include epilepsy, FASD, cerebral palsy, sensory processing disorder, and likely autism.

Hillary's history with people with disabilities shows her esteem for their lives. Our family has directly benefited from IDEA, the federal law requiring the inclusion of children with disabilities in public schools. She was not only involved in its reauthorization but served as a pioneer to pave the way for it in the first place. Hillary began her law career before IDEA or its predecessor Public Law 94-142 had been passed, yet one of her earliest projects with the Children's Defense Fund was advocating for kids with special needs to have a place in the classroom. Beyond that, she has spoken out about the need to end the sheltered workshop models for the employment of adults with disabilities, which is absolutely needed but often ignored. Work provides dignity, and to me, ensuring that those with disabilities can both work and be paid a fair wage is a pro-life issue. Beyond that, her proposals about autism services and research are cutting edge and reflect true listening to adults with autism instead of focusing on causes and cures, which we've unsuccessfully done for years. Her pledged support for the Disability Integration Act, furthermore, shows that adults with disabilities are on her radar (with long term care in the DNC platform this year), which shows a distinctly different value for these lives than what we're seeing from any candidate before her and, in particular, from Trump.

Trump's public stance on people with disabilities is appalling. He insultingly mimicked Serge Kovalski, a reporter with a physical disability. Prior to that, he had mocked Charles Krauthammer, a conservative journalist who uses a wheelchair who is critical of Trump, as being someone who can't even buy a pair of pants. Before that, he called another journalist "retarded" for criticizing him. Last week, one of Wednesday's DNC speakers was a man with a form of dwarfism, and Thursday afternoon Trump said he wanted to punch several of the people who spoke the night before, in particular "a very little guy." I don't think that's a coincidence. No, he was once again mocking someone with a disability and, this time, threatening harm against him. Beyond that bullying, as a businessman, Trump's properties were found again and again to violate the Americans with Disabilities Act. On multiple occasions, including during GOP debates, he's made scientifically disproven remarks about autism-vaccine links, continuing to misdirect people from the real issues surrounding autism. I don't see anything pro-life in his words or actions here. On Supreme Court nominees, I don't trust that he'll consider the rights or lives of those with disabilities in his appointments, and our treatment of that oft-vulnerable group is as much a measure of our values and affirmation (or refutation) of the truth of the gospel as how we treat babies in the womb.

As the mother of children with disabilities, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with him. I can't.

## **2. The lives of women who would otherwise get abortions**

Women don't get abortions for fun. The procedure isn't a game. No, women who get abortions generally do so because they feel like they don't have other options. Removing access to abortions won't change that reality. Just bankrupting Planned Parenthood or restricting abortion by law won't resolve the reasons behind the 3 in 10 women who will have had an abortion by the time they turn 40.

So why not focus on policies that reduce the demand for abortion? For example, empowering poor and low-income women can make a difference in overall pregnancy termination rates, as this demographic constitutes 75% of abortions. Increasing access to birth control reduces the rate of unplanned pregnancies, especially among low income women. It's simple: if women don't get pregnant, then they don't get abortions. Providing supports for single mothers is also beneficial, as more than 80% of those obtaining abortions are unmarried, most of whom are not living with the father. Family supports in general can be beneficial as well, considering that about 60% of women getting abortions already have given birth at least once. Increasing educational access can also make a difference, as those who have a college degree are less likely to have an abortion while those without a high school or college diploma are more likely. Additionally, racial inequities in all these areas – education, income levels, and so on – lead to higher rates of abortions among black women than any other group and slightly higher rates among Hispanic women. Considering what I presented in the last section, improving outcomes for people living with disabilities matters too, as better supports make the prospect of giving birth to and raising a child with a prenatal disability diagnosis less daunting. Furthermore, talking frankly about the issue of rape, including on college campuses and in child abuse contexts, and taking appropriate action prevents conception in those circumstances. Democrats are consistently doing these things, with Hillary's track record clear.

Hillary started the first rape crisis hotline in Arkansas and helped other cities and states to do likewise. Shortly after she graduated from law school, she was considered a leading advocate for abused and neglected children. When Bill was president, my friend Susan served with Hillary to make meaningful change on behalf of kids in foster care, a demographic in which girls are much more likely to become pregnant as teenagers as compared to their peers. All of those actions show a value for the lives of women and children who are vulnerable. Meanwhile Trump's compassion on this matter merely extends to including rape and incest among categories for which abortions are acceptable to him.

As the mother of children who one day might benefit from any or all of these policies, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. As someone who believes the best anti-abortion policies prevent abortions rather than ban them, I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with him. I can't.

### **3. The lives of all women**

I'm not saying this because Hillary is a woman. Those who dismiss Obama's black supporters or Hillary's female supporters for voting just because of race or gender are insulting (and also ignoring the actual reality that many chose or will choose not to vote for them based on those factors). So, please, don't assume I'm saying this because Hillary is a woman and so am I. I'm looking at policies and statements, not the gender of the candidates, although I do believe their lived experiences in each gender has influenced their stances.

I'm saying her views are superior here because she has solid and clear stances on women's issues, the majority of which are aligned with my views. Meanwhile, Trump historically and recently demeans women with his words and actions. Here's one of many sites documenting some of those remarks. I would offer policies here, but he hasn't proposed anything to benefit women, so all I can offer is his misogynistic statements. When someone preaches about the importance of biblical womanhood or manhood and then endorses a man like Trump, that tells me your theology isn't as important as you claim.

As the mother of four amazing daughters, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. As a woman myself and one who values other women, I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with him. I can't.

### **4. The lives of refugees and other immigrants**

When every single Republican candidate came out against refugees, most spouting inaccurate statements about the vetting process, this issue is the one that made me turn to my husband and say, surprised, "I might be voting for a Democrat this year in the presidential election." He – a lifelong Republican – replied, "Um, of course you are. Have you been listening to yourself?" (Side note: In every presidential election thus far, I've voted Republican or third party.) Where we live, a resettlement site for refugees is right around the corner. We shop and eat and walk and feed geese with these friends. It's easy to look at some filtered negative videos on a biased website and harder to look at and know real people. Just as Westboro Baptist Church and the KKK don't represent me as a Christian, the worst offenders of any demographic aren't representative of the whole either.

Beyond that, Trump's comments about immigrants and plans for the border are beyond absurd. I lived on the border for two years in my earlier 20s. (By "on the border," I mean I could see the tree line of the Rio Grande River from my front yard and I sat on its banks - on the left in the picture below with Mexico on the right - to grade papers, waving a friendly hello to Border Patrol agents as they passed, doing their important work.) I'm not saying this makes me an expert, but I'm confident it makes me more knowledgeable than Donald. I got to know and teach and love and worship with immigrants, many of whom were undocumented and came with hopes of a better life, fleeing realities that I would gladly break any law to flee for the wellbeing of myself and my children. Caricatures work well in stump speeches, but they rarely reflect reality.

Trump says, "They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists... No apology because everything I said is 100% correct." Except it's not. For starters, "they" aren't sending people. People are coming. Drug runners and criminals and rapists can easily do those things in Mexico or any other country; they don't need to come here for that. For the opportunities our country provides, they do. That's what our friends who arrive illegally do. I know enough of this community to speak about them with nuance instead of turning them into racist stereotypes. Furthermore, the idea of building a wall and making Mexico pay for it is beyond impractical. Does anyone believe that will actually happen?

Hillary's stance, however, has shown a balance of the need for security with a compassion for humanity. Her policy proposals prioritize keeping immigrant families intact. (Are we supposed to be selective about which families we value? That's how it seems in a lot of the positions we take, but I'm not sure where we can find that in the Bible.) She promises to "enforce immigration laws humanely." Those words from her website jumped out at me. The reality is that our immigration system is broken, with long waits and exorbitant fees and illogical processes. I saw that when I lived on the border, I've heard that from dear friends who have navigated the system legally and illegally, and I experienced that in our international adoption processes. I don't find the pro-life solution to be punishing those seeking a better life for the mess we've made.

As the mother of four immigrants, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. As someone who believes life matters no matter where you were born, I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with him. I can't.

## **5. The lives of racial and ethnic minorities**

For starters, can we acknowledge that "make America great again" is a slogan that only applies to white men? What they call the good old days were days in which women and our neighbors of color couldn't vote or attend integrated schools or college. What they call the good old days were the ones in which the larger public didn't know about police brutality against minorities because we didn't have camera phones or social media. What they call the good old days are times in which white men didn't have to admit any privilege or offer seats at any table to those with different lived experiences than theirs. What they call the good old days are an era in which my multiracial family couldn't exist. As such, even apart from Trump's racist and misogynist comments, his slogan itself smacks of an ignorance toward the reality that in the good old days, America was only great for the lives of white men and not others.

But let's talk specifically about his words and actions versus Hillary's. She started her career fighting racial segregation in private schools subsidized by public funds. Meanwhile, the Justice Department twice sued Trump's real estate business for discriminating against black would-be renters. Given the number of abhorrent comments he's made about "the blacks" and "the Hispanics" as monolithic groupings devoid of any personal characteristics, he has shown again and again that he doesn't value the lives of racial and ethnic minorities. I could provide more racist remarks here, but I think other media sources have reported comprehensively on those, and this post is already long enough.

On the issue of Supreme Court appointments, I was grieved recently by the 5-3 ruling in *Utah v. Strieff* in which the rights – and lives – of minorities weren't valued. Racial profiling was upheld as constitutional under a broad swath of circumstances, in direct violation of 4th amendment rights. After detailing the evidence that minorities are more likely to be stopped without cause, Sotomayor states, "By legitimizing the conduct that produces this double consciousness, this case tells everyone, white and black, guilty and innocent, that an officer can verify your legal status at any time. It says that your body is subject to invasion while courts excuse the violation of your rights." (I encourage you to read Justice Sotomayor's complete dissent, starting on page 14 here.) Ultimately, Trump's stances lend toward nominees like the five who voted in the majority in this decision, while I trust Hillary's to be more aligned with the three who dissented. This, to me, is a pro-life issue as well. Do we value the lives of our fellow citizens with brown or black skin as much as other lives? Do we value the life and rights of my black son as much as my white one? If not, can we honestly call ourselves pro-life?

As the mother of four children of color, three black and one Asian, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. As someone who is striving to be an ally to and learner from those with the lived experiences unique to people of color, I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with him. I can't.

## **6. The lives of religious minorities**

I'm a Christian. The history of this nation has privileged people of my faith. But we were founded as a place in which religious liberty for all was a foundational principle. If we place limits on the expression of faith of any group – like Muslims – then we're eroding religious freedom for all groups – including Christians. When conservatives kept claiming Obama was a Muslim, as if that was an insult, it undermined their claims of being a party for religious liberty. When their nominee has gone on record saying a registry of all Muslims would be a good idea, arguing that all Muslims should be banned from traveling to our country, and stating that a Muslim judge might be biased against him like a Hispanic one would be (both preposterous claims), I don't see the GOP as protecting my rights as a Christian. Beyond that, I worry for the lives of those who wear outer expressions of their faith, like the mom of my daughter's classmate last year. In the week after the Paris terror attack, she waited to leave her vehicle until I arrived so she could walk in with me. I was honored to join her while brokenhearted that she didn't feel safe in this country we both love.

Furthermore, when I consider Supreme Court appointments, I don't trust Trump – based on what I laid out in the last paragraph – to appoint those who will uphold and not erode religious freedom in our country. We can't pick and choose which religions we want to protect. We can't insist that the worst examples of Christianity don't represent the whole while arguing that the worst examples of Islam represent all Muslims. That's not who we are as a country. And that's not pro-life, when we say that the lives of adherents of certain faiths or no faith matter more or less than others.

As a mother raising my children to be people of faith, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. As someone who believes the value of life isn't based in how you pray, if you pray, or to whom you pray, I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with him. I can't.

## **7. The lives of the LGBTQ+ community**

I'm not going to get into a religious discussion here, because no matter what you believe, I don't think anything I say will influence you. That's not the point, anyway, so I'm writing this in a way that I hope will make sense even if you don't agree with *Obergefell v. Hodges*. My inclusion of the lives of the LGBTQ+ community affirms that their lives are valuable. I think we can all agree on that, right?

LGBT youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. We know that this isn't due to some instability innate to sexuality because that rate is 20% greater in unsupportive environments than in supportive ones. One study of LGB and questioning youth, published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* in 2009, showed that those LGB youth who hadn't experienced bullying had the lowest rates of depression of any group, including heterosexual classmates. Among transgender youth, a recent study in Canada showed that rates of suicide consideration or attempts were significantly reduced by social inclusion, protection from bullying and violence, and parental supports. In other words, the higher rates of suicides and attempts in this demographic are strongly correlated with the culture in which they live. As someone who values the lives of those in the LGBTQ+ community, I am skeptical of politicians who never once address these hard numbers, no matter what their views may be on marriage or bathrooms.

(All that said, I think it's only fair to share where I stand here, which is in support of *Obergefell v. Hodges* and in opposition to HB2. But I think every remark in this section still holds true even if you stand elsewhere on these issues.)

As the mother of children whose worth isn't based in their sexuality or gender identity, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. As one who believes the value of life isn't based in who you love or how you identify, I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with him. I can't.

## **8. The lives of those with HIV/AIDS here and around the world**

I'm passionate about adoption, yes, but I'm even more passionate about orphan prevention. Many kids in various parts of the world become orphans because of AIDS. Among certain groups in the US, HIV rates are rising as well. Given the amazing treatments available and advancements in preventative care - like PrEP - this shouldn't be the case.

As First Lady of Arkansas, Hillary first got involved in HIV/AIDS advocacy. This was the early 90s, when politicians from both parties were largely ignoring those living with and dying from these diagnoses. She spoke at that time about her friends Dan Bradley, who died of an AIDS-related illness in 1988 and, later, was friends with Bob Hattoy, an advocate and Clinton staffer who eventually died of AIDS-related complications in 2007. These personal relationships seem to have driven her to talk openly and knowledgeably about the impact of HIV/AIDS, well before others were willing to do so. For her, this advocacy wasn't about appearances or personal advancement. It was an expression of her value for the lives of her friends and others who lived with or died from HIV/AIDS. The DNC last week included among speakers a black gay man living with HIV, who shared that if trends continue, 50% of gay black men will be HIV+ in their lifetime. Hillary knows this and cares. Meanwhile, Trump intends to roll back all facets of Obamacare, including the provision for coverage of pre-existing conditions which has benefited those affected by HIV, without any indication of whether or not he cares or what he has in mind for those who will be shut out of the insurance system as a result.

Even more impressive, Hillary has declared that we need to "reform outdated, stigmatizing HIV criminalization laws," which is 100% true. In many places, our child with HIV, when he/she grows up, could be arrested, charged, and imprisoned for sexual contact with someone who is HIV-, even if disclosures were made in advance and even if HIV isn't transmitted. This is because discriminatory laws based in fear instead of science are still on the books, and I'm thankful to see a presidential candidate address this need for change. I'm seriously impressed by this as well as the entirety of her position on HIV/AIDS issues.

Furthermore, Hillary has supported for PEPFAR - The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief - which was implemented by George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice with Hillary voting in favor of it as a senator and then renewed under Obama and implemented in large part by Hillary as Secretary of State. I've seen first-hand the positive impact of PEPFAR in Uganda as I spent multiple days at a pediatric HIV clinic there with my child. Meanwhile, Trump has once said PEPFAR funding should be doubled and then later said we didn't need to send any more aid overseas, so none of us really know where he stands.

As the mother of a child living with HIV and children who have lost loved ones to AIDS-related illnesses, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. As one who believes the value of life isn't diminished by a diagnosis, I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with him. I can't.

## **9. The lives of our armed forces**

Yes, Benghazi was a total clusterf@\*#. I won't deny that. It's part of what makes me wish I had another choice. But I do think Hillary learned from the grievous errors leading up to and following that horrible day. On multiple occasions, she said she took responsibility for what happened, as well as admitting that mistakes were made and stating that her biggest regret as Secretary of State was the tragedy of Benghazi. Likewise, her email debacle - in which a conservative FBI director found no illegal behavior consistent with prosecution of previous cases, though plenty of unethical and unwise decision making - shows poor judgment as well. But, again, I think - perhaps naively - that you can't go through the investigations and scrutiny she's experienced without learning something. I wish she didn't take so long to admit fault and apologize, but she eventually got to that point. Some say that was pandering; I see it as progress. (And if you want to say she hasn't learned anything and her past statements and actions prove she's corrupt, I respect that. I do. But I don't understand how you can then vote for Trump, because I could argue the same for him.)

That said, Hillary has more foreign affairs experience than any presidential candidate in this race, even before it dropped down to the choices we have now. As Secretary of State, she met with leaders in 112 countries. Before that, she visited 82 countries as First Lady. Her experience in foreign affairs is extensive. Travel alone isn't the only marker of that. I was astounded by the number of military leaders speaking at the DNC last week, vouching Hillary as the best choice for our troops and most knowledgeable in this area of policy.

Meanwhile, just last week, Trump directly asked Russia to commit espionage by getting and releasing Hillary's missing emails and then later said he was being sarcastic. How is that acceptable for a presidential candidate? He has suggested we need to use nuclear weapons against ISIS, without any military leader supporting his dangerous views, and he has said he considers international agreements like the Geneva Convention to be arbitrary rules that hold back our soldiers. Regarding his comments about NATO, even leaders in his own party pushed back. Mitch McConnell denounced Trump's stance but said it was "a rookie mistake." I don't know about you, but I don't see the presidency as the place for rookie mistakes, not when the lives of our men and women in uniform are on the line.

He has regularly advocated for the use of torture, including waterboarding, and said that the military won't refuse his orders if he commands them to commit war crimes. In June, he said "you know they're allowed to cut off heads and they're allowed to chop off heads, and we can't waterboard." But the principled response to terrorism isn't to act like the terrorists. Like Michelle Obama said in her speech last week, when they go low, we go high. That's who we are as a country. ISIS does unthinkable things because they're ISIS; we don't because America is better than that. We are already great, and Trump's call for us to "do things that are unthinkable" would diminish our greatness and show disregard for both life and our own integrity. I get that some people don't like Hillary because she seems too polished, but I can't fathom how someone so woefully unpolished in so many of his foreign policy remarks is a better alternative.

As a matter of fact, even those who are usually allied with Republicans don't trust Trump to lead our military...

As I share with my children about my father's Green Beret service in Vietnam and both of my grandfathers' military service in WW2, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. As someone who believes the best way to honor our troops' lives is to give them a Commander in Chief who respects both them and the laws pertaining to war, I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with him. I can't.

## **10. The lives of those killed by gun violence**

I know pro-life and pro-gun stances often go hand in hand, so I know I'm going to lose some of you here. So be it. To me, I can't consider the stances of the NRA to be pro-life.

(Side note: My husband is a lifetime member of the NRA. I obviously have opinions on that, which he knows well. I drew a firm line against purchasing such a membership for any of our children when the idea came up early on, as it's much cheaper in their first year of life than any time later on. And he owns guns, which are safely and responsibly locked away. I share all this to demonstrate two points: First, it's possible to disagree about gun policy and still get along. Second, it's possible to have differing views about the NRA and still get along. As I've said often, all of us can disagree without being disagreeable.)

I was in high school when Columbine happened. I remember the shock of the attack and fear upon returning to school amidst bomb threats. I never imagined this trend would continue. I didn't expect, when my oldest child was halfway into her kindergarten year, to consider whether or not I should go pick her up early after another elementary school, several states north of us, experienced a gun massacre. This summer I've watched with dismay as black men have been wrongfully killed by officers with guns and officers have been gunned down by a man who never should have gotten a weapon in the first place. I stand with Hillary when she says, as she did during her acceptance speech, "I'm not here to take away your guns. I just don't want you to be shot by someone who shouldn't have a gun in the first place."



Trump is endorsed by the NRA, an organization I find as disturbing as Planned Parenthood. Hillary bravely, in my opinion, stands opposed to them. The Republican platform not only stands in favor of the Second Amendment but even stands against limiting the capacity of magazines (an appropriate gun control stance suggested in this post by a pro-gun advocate). The Democrat platform calls for better enforcement of existing gun legislation and advancing other laws to decrease gun violence. To me, this shows a deep value for life by the DNC over the GOP's value for gun-related hobbies. The NRA talks again and again about the need for citizens to protect themselves with guns, but a gun is more likely to be stolen than to be used in self-defense. I've watched the NRA over the years. I've read their literature and listened their robocalls, directed toward us because of my husband's membership. I've tried to be able to side with Lee here. But? The reality is that the NRA isn't a protector of the 2nd Amendment but rather a large lobby organization for the gun industry. They do that well. I don't fault them for being effective in their use of funds. I do fault their history of being involved in racist gun policy, which led – for example – to Martin Luther King, Jr. being denied his application for a concealed carry permit when he applied for one after his home was bombed. I do fault them for refusing to stand for Philando Castile recently as a concealed carry permit holder who was wrongfully killed by an officer after disclosing that he was legally in possession of a firearm. To me, this indicates that their racist roots are still pervasive today. Again, I don't fault them for advocating well for their industry. I just don't consider it pro-life to support a candidate they've bought.

As my children ask questions about the increasing gun violence in our country, I can't look them in the eye, say I value them deeply, and then justify a vote for Trump. Even as my husband and I disagree on the Second Amendment, I can't say I'm pro-life and say I'm with the Republican candidate. I can't.

But what about the lives of unborn babies?

I'm not saying any of those 10 groups trump pre-born babies. (And, as a note of clarification here, I believe life begins scientifically at the moment of conception when new and unique DNA is created when the egg and sperm meet. Of course, miscarriages occur, and many women grieve that as the loss of a child. Except in circumstances like ectopic pregnancies and other realities in which medical intervention is needed, life will continue from that point unless interrupted. No matter the circumstances of conception, stopping the life cycle of the growing child isn't appropriate to me.) Unborn babies' lives are vulnerable, more vulnerable than any other demographic because they can't survive without a supportive womb and other interventions in their best interests.

Honestly, I wish one of our major parties – or a third party, whether viable for winning the election or not – holistically supported life at all stages. My choice would be easier if that were true. It's not, though. And I can't accept that being pro-life is simply being anti-abortion. That's not pro-life. It's not.

So when I can identify one party standing – maybe – for the lives of those who are yet to be born while I see the other party showing value for lives after they're born, I hate the choice to be made. But I don't see how I can say "Jesus loves you" to anyone living while saying, in essence, "but my faith says the lives of those unborn trump the love I'm willing to show you in my political decisions." That's what I feel like I would be saying if I chose to vote for a candidate who claims now to be anti-abortion over another candidate who has shown more post-birth pro-life sentiment. What is our Christian witness to those who have been born when we insist that the lives of the unborn matter more in our votes than their lives do?

But what about Planned Parenthood?

I'm writing this portion while watching the president of Planned Parenthood address the Democratic National Convention. She is talking about supporting women through reproductive cancers and conveniently glossing over their abortion services. But here's the thing: not enough women's health clinics exist to provide the non-

abortion services Planned Parenthood provides. And I don't see Republicans – especially Trump and Pence – offering any plans for that provision when they talk about stripping funding from Planned Parenthood. Likewise, the Texas law recently overturned by the Supreme Court showed concern for women's health at first glance, but it was shrewdly crafted to shut down abortion clinics without any provisions for helping those operations that lacked adequate health care for women meet the standards required by law. If the law's proponents wanted to make sure these clinics were safe for women, they could have included that in their law, but that wasn't their primary goal. No, as shown in rhetoric from those who supported the measure, closing abortion clinics was what was celebrated again and again, while improving care for women sounded like more of an afterthought or cover story.

Listen, I don't like Planned Parenthood's practices. I don't find them to be honest or ethical. (Again, I feel the same way about the NRA. In other words, my political beliefs can offend folks on both sides of the aisle.) But I need for those speaking about ending Planned Parenthood to also be pushing for equally accessible health care options for the women, like many of my friends, who use or have used Planned Parenthood to meet non-abortion needs. If we're not talking about those alternatives, then I don't see how we can call ourselves pro-life or pro-woman; we're simply anti-abortion.

And what about the explicitly pro-choice elements of the Democratic platform?

I won't sugarcoat it. I don't care for their platform on this issue. (Nor do I care for the many portions of the Republican platform that I consider to be anti-life. Truly, I'm convinced that neither party is pro-life, not in the fullest sense in which life is demonstrably valued from conception to the grave.)

The Democrat's platform affirms a women's right to abortion. I don't like that, but I also don't think condemning abortion or shaming those involved with the practice will make any difference in the rates of pregnancy termination. I'd even appreciate a return to a couple platforms ago, when Democrats called for abortion to be rare. Sadly, that was dropped four years ago.

The DNC platform goes even further, calling for the full repeal of the Hyde Amendment, while the Republican platform calls for the upholding of it. I disagree with both. I support the Hyde Amendment, which bans the use of federal funds for abortion, with exceptions for rape and incest and the life of the mother. But at one point, it also included provisions for the health of the mother, beyond merely if her life were in danger. But currently low income women are denied the full spectrum of reproductive healthcare if, for example, a continued pregnancy would cause grave and long-lasting health consequences for the mother or a prenatal condition were diagnosed that meant a child would die before birth or shortly after. I believe we can restrict abortion funding – while non-governmental entities stand in the gap to provide those services to women who still choose them – from taxpayers like myself, who stand opposed to abortion, without robbing doctors and women of their ability to make medical decisions. It's a fine line, sure, but it makes sense to me. Anything else seems as if we're supporting the abortion choices of wealthier women while restricting them for those living in or near poverty.

Furthermore, I really wish the Democratic platform didn't call for repealing all “federal and state laws and policies that impede a woman's access to abortion.” But I don't see them finding success in those attempts, and, again, I find preventing abortion to be more effective at protecting life – both the life of the mother and the life of the child – than blocking abortion access. I'd love for a major political party to work to protect life in a multi-faceted way, but that's not our reality. So, as I see it, the decision isn't between a pro-life candidate (if we can trust his word, which I sincerely doubt) and a pro-choice one. It's between one pro-life approach versus another.

So what are you trying to say here?

I didn't write this to change your mind. I don't think the internet is meant to do that. I wrote this because I wanted to answer what I see as a valid question: How can I be pro-life and vote for Hillary?

I've laid out the reasons above, but I'll add one more here. On her official campaign site, Hillary's stances on a multitude of life-affirming issues are both clear and robust. Trump's, by comparison, are anemic. As the supposed anti-abortion candidate, he doesn't even include any statement on abortion in his positions.

Her detailed issues, as of July 29, 2016, as I write this, include a fair tax system, addiction and substance use, an economy that works for everyone, an end to Alzheimer's disease, campaign finance reform, autism, campus sexual assault, climate change, combating terrorism and keeping the homeland safe, criminal justice reform, disability, rights, early childhood education, fixing America's infrastructure, gun violence prevention, health care, HIV and AIDS, immigration reform, jobs and wages, K-12 education, labor and workers' rights, LGBT rights and equality, making college debt-free and taking on student debt, manufacturing, military and defense, national security, paid family and medical leave, protecting animals and wildlife, racial justice, rural communities, small business, social security and Medicare, technology and innovation, veterans and their families, voting rights, Wall Street reform, and workforce skills and job training.

Trump merely lists pay for the wall, healthcare reform, US-China trade reform, veterans administration reform, tax reform, second amendment rights, and immigration reform, with none of the topics explained with as much detail as any given issues on Hillary's site.

One reason I'm voting for Hillary is that I know what and who I'm voting for. With Trump, no one knows anything for sure, except that he's a firebrand who mouths off and backtracks on a regular basis. Furthermore, the reason we have so much to criticize about Hillary is that she's been in the public eye and public service for ages. Meanwhile, we can only focus on Trump's words because he doesn't have a history here. (Yes, I do find it ironic that many of the same people who were critical of Obama for not having enough political experience are supporting Trump, even though he has far less. His most extensive political experience to date has been financially contributing hundreds of thousands of dollars to pro-choice Democratic candidates over the years, yet many conservatives are lauding him as the pro-life choice. I don't get it.)

You might not think I've made a solid case for Hillary as a viable pro-life candidate, and that's fair. But I hope you won't be quick to dismiss the realities I've shared about why I can't consider Trump to be pro-life either. In other words, I understand how you can look at Hillary's track record on abortion and not be able to say, "I'm with her." Really, I get that. I just don't understand how you can look at Trump's track record on not just abortion but on life across the board and say you're with him. To me, being pro-life can't just be about ensuring that babies are born without also affirming their value after birth through our words, actions, and policies.

If we disagree here, that's okay. You vote your conscience, and I'll vote mine. We've lost the skill of civil discourse, especially in politics. But I'm confident we can disagree without being disagreeable. Please prove me right in your comments, because I'm always up for spirited debate but I delete any comments with insults or name-calling. My blog and Facebook pages are my online houses, so while I won't tell you not to speak your voice, I will ask you to leave my house (or delete comments/exercise the block function) if you can't do so with kindness and decency.

Right now, I'm planning to vote for Hillary. And I'm still pro-life. Those two realities aren't mutually exclusive.