

SHIFTING THE TERMS OF THE DEBATE

In the wake of the midterm elections, some politicians who oppose the rights of the unborn, and who oppose parental rights, are trying to shift the terms of the debate. It's a clever but ultimately failed tactic.

There are political, economic, social and cultural dimensions to practically every domestic and foreign issue. But that doesn't mean there is no primary dimension. It depends on the issue.

War is primarily a political issue. The stock market is primarily an economic issue. The family is primarily a social issue. Religion is primarily a cultural issue.

In November, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said that "It's so out of touch to imply that abortion isn't an economic issue." She added, "Few things impact one's finances more than having a child."

It appears she took her talking points from Planned Parenthood. On October 27, the Action Fund arm of Planned Parenthood issued what it calls "The Quickie," which declared, "Abortion Is An Economic Issue."

This is a losing strategy. No one denies that abortion has economic ramifications, but it is, and always will be, primarily a matter of science, of biology, in particular. Our DNA, which defines our unique personhood, is present at conception, not a day later.

It is true that this does not settle the debate. Ineluctably, there is the moral question: Should society recognize the rights of the unborn? But this, too, is not a matter of economics.

Rep. Eric Swalwell chose the same tactic—he tried to shift the terms of the debate—but he chose a different subject. He chose parental rights.

He said it was “so stupid” for parents to maintain that they should have a say in their child’s education. “Please tell me what I’m missing here. What are we doing next? Putting parents in charge of their surgeries? Clients in charge of their trials. When did we stop trusting the experts? This is so stupid.”

We haven’t stopped trusting the experts. It’s just that when it comes to children, their parents are the experts, not anyone else.

Parents are not demanding they have a say in teaching algebra. They are saying they have a role in determining their child’s character formation. They also object when teachers move from education to indoctrination.

To be specific, when teachers overstep their boundaries by seeking to indoctrinate children with radical ideas about sexuality, they need to be called out about it. Children do not belong to the state. And teachers work for the taxpayers.

Debates about public policy and pedagogy assume a certain measure of intellectual honesty. When the terms of the debate are shifted for entirely political reasons, no meaningful exchange is possible.

Those who play this game—and it is a game—know they cannot persuade the public on the merits of their argument, which is why they seek to change the subject. No one should fall for it.