

## Presidential Hopefuls: Mitt Romney

**Is the former Massachusetts governor too much of a flip-flopper for pro-lifers to trust? Mary Ann Glendon doesn't think so.**

BY CHARLOTTE HAYS

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WASHINGTON — Although Mitt Romney will run as a pro-life candidate if he gets the Republican nod for 2012, the former Massachusetts governor's record leaves many pro-lifers uneasy.

Some felt he showed his true colors recently when he refused to sign the Susan B. Anthony List's "Pro-Life Leadership Pledge." Michele Bachman, Newt Gingrich, Thaddeus McCotter, Ron Paul, Tim Pawlenty and Rick Santorum all signed it.

The pledge calls on candidates to nominate to the U.S. federal bench judges who are "committed to restraint and applying the original meaning of the Constitution, not legislating from the bench"; to select "only pro-life appointees for relevant cabinet and executive branch positions"; to advance pro-life legislation to permanently end all "taxpayer funding of abortion in all domestic and international spending programs, and defund Planned Parenthood and all other contractors and recipients of federal funds with affiliates that perform or fund abortions"; and to "advance and sign into law a Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act to protect unborn children who are capable of feeling pain from abortion."

A Catholic legal scholar with impeccable pro-life credentials, however, said Romney did the right thing.

"I know that he agrees with its spirit and substance, but, unfortunately, the pledge is so broadly drafted that I, as a pro-life lawyer myself, would have advised him not to sign," said Mary Ann Glendon, former U.S. ambassador to the Holy See and a Harvard University law professor.

"To promise to defund all recipients of federal funds with affiliates that perform or fund abortions," Glendon said, "would entail defunding practically every health-care provider in the United States."

Glendon will be co-chairing Lawyers for Romney.

But Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the Susan B. Anthony List, said, "Our next president must recognize the urgency of addressing over a million abortions per year. That's why our pledge calls for active leadership, not just checking the box. Six candidates took the pledge, and the pro-life grassroots know where they stand. Romney has submitted his own pro-life pledge on NRO [*National Review Online*]'s *The Corner*, and we certainly appreciate his support for many pro-life efforts. However, he still seems to indicate that he wants the freedom to nominate pro-abortion candidates for key cabinet positions such as attorney general or secretary of Health and Human Services. This is precisely what we want to rule out, and it is unacceptable. We are hoping Gov. Romney has a change of heart and that he does sign the pro-life leadership pledge."

Whatever one thinks of Romney's decision about the pledge, his record on the life issues is full of zigzags. Angry members of Planned Parenthood — who had formerly regarded Romney as an ally — once threatened to show up at a pro-life gala honoring Romney wearing flip-flops to symbolize his switching sides. Romney, who attended a Planned Parenthood fundraiser in 1994, now calls for blocking federal funding of the organization.

The former governor was squarely in the pro-abortion camp for the early part of his political career. As recently as the 2002 Massachusetts gubernatorial race, Romney repeatedly defended what he then termed "a woman's right to choose." In a meeting with executives from NARAL Pro-Choice America, Romney reportedly hinted at national aspirations, adding, "You need somebody like me in Washington."

But then, in 2005, Romney, in an about-face, vetoed a bill legalizing the so-called "morning after" pill (though Romney later ordered hospitals to give the pill in rape cases). Romney followed up the veto, which provoked fury from the pro-abortion side, with an article explaining it in the *Boston Globe*: He declared, "I am pro-life."



Romney also came under scrutiny when, in 2007, an agency in his administration approved a \$5 million tax exempt loan to a Planned Parenthood facility in Worcester. The governor said he knew nothing about it.

### **Pro-Life 'Convert'**

Romney described a journey that had begun with the study of embryonic stem-cell cloning and research. "I saw where the harsh logic of abortion can lead — to the view of innocent new life as nothing more than research material or a commodity to be exploited," the governor wrote. He argued that the issue of abortion is best left to the states. Romney later vetoed a bill that would have allowed embryonic research, though the Massachusetts Legislature overrode his veto.

Boston-area Operation Rescue leader William Cotter found Romney's "abrupt conversion" unconvincing.

"If you go to YouTube," said Cotter, "you can see the passion with which Romney argued the pro-choice position when he was running for the Senate against Ted Kennedy."

But Ann Fox, president of Massachusetts Citizens for Life, took a different view. "When the embryonic stem-cell issue came along," Fox said, "he said he could then see the abortion issue more clearly. He was governor of Massachusetts, and being pro-life wasn't going to do him any good."

Massachusetts Citizens for Life gave Romney its Political Leadership Award in 2007. Romney described himself that night as a "convert" to the pro-life cause, although, shortly afterwards, in addressing the National Right to Life Committee, Romney said he had been "always personally opposed to abortion." Romney made a \$15,000 contribution to Massachusetts Citizens for Life in 2006.

Dr. John Willke, a veteran of the pro-life movement, endorsed Romney when he ran for president in 2008 and says he has not withdrawn his approval. "I don't think Romney will go back on his pro-life commitment," Willke said.

### **'RomneyCare'**

Same-sex "marriage" became a hot issue in 2003 when the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that the state's denial of marriage licenses to same-sex couples was unconstitutional. In an attempt to prevent the spread of same-sex "marriage," Romney invoked a 1913 law (originally designed to prevent interracial marriage) that made couples ineligible to wed in their own states unable to marry in Massachusetts. Romney also supported a proposal that would have banned homosexual "marriage" while allowing civil unions.

Some opponents of same-sex "marriage," however, say Romney's opposition was weak and that he actually helped push it by authorizing clerks to begin issuing licenses to same-sex couples before it was necessary. "He let it happen," said Phil Lawler of *Catholic World News*.

And then there is Romney's signature health-care overhaul, which includes taxpayer-funded abortions. But Romney supporters point out that the original bill has been through many changes, and it is by no means clear that Romney would have supported taxpayer-funded abortion. Brian Camenker, president of the Parents' Rights Coalition, said that the co-pay "drives pro-lifers crazy," insisting that Romney "didn't fight it."

Romney may face an uphill path with many pro-lifer voters.

"What can I say?" said Lawler. "I don't trust him. He's made it clear that the life issues don't count for much with him. They're not his issues."

Mary Ann Glendon disagrees.

"After participating in a searching no-holds-barred conversation among Mitt, his wife, Anne, and a group of pro-life activists in March 2007," Glendon said, "I was completely convinced of his sincerity on the life issues. The pro-life movement has staked so much on the confidence that people's minds can be changed that it would be strange to accuse a person of 'flip-flopping' when, as in Mitt's case, his mind and heart have brought him to respect the dignity of human life from conception to natural death."

### **Economic Issues**

The health-care issue intersects with economic and stewardship aspects of Romney's stance, and there, too, he gets mixed reviews.

"Romneycare is a black mark on his record," said Barney Keller of the Club for Growth, a free-market organization in Washington. Keller said that Romney is "a bit of a technocrat" and that sometimes in solving a problem he doesn't rely on free-market principles. "Gov. Romney decided the problem was that not everybody had health insurance. But he relied on government, not the free market, to solve the problem," Keller said.

The Massachusetts system includes a mandate that all citizens must purchase health insurance. This requirement

is uncomfortably close to the so-called individual mandate in the Obama administration plan. Romney — who has said he would grant all states waivers releasing them from the Obama administration system — has steadfastly maintained that the mandate is inappropriate on a national level, but not for Massachusetts.

Since Romneycare became law in 2006, the number of uninsured in Massachusetts has fallen from 6% to 2%, but *The Wall Street Journal* reports that four out of five of the newly insured get state subsidies. The cost to the state is expected to be around \$830 million this year, according to the newspaper. Moreover, the price of insurance premiums and the time it takes to get medical care have both increased.

Peter Ferrara, author and senior fellow at the Heartland Institute, says Romneycare “undermines economic growth” and makes it less likely that patients will receive the most advanced medical care.

“The problem is that when he had power he wasn’t as free market as he is now. Exhibit A is Romneycare,” said Dan Mitchell, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington, D.C.

### Helping the Needy

A successful venture capitalist credited with having rescued the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City from financial ruin, Mitt Romney should have no trouble presenting himself as a steward of economic resources.

But his presidential campaign has been so cautious about taking stands, preferring to speak in generalities, that *Politico*, a Washington daily devoured by political junkies, has referred to the “Mittness protection program.”

The campaign declined to answer a set of specific questions on economics submitted by the Register.

Still, there are three ways to glean understanding of what economic policies Romney might adopt as president: his choice of economic advisers, his record in Massachusetts and his 2010 book *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness* (the title is an allusion to what Romney sees as a tendency on the part of Obama to apologize for America’s past actions).

Romney sees private enterprise, not government, as crucial to the creation of a thriving economy. He would eliminate personal taxes on dividends, interest and capital gains for middle-income families. He wants to simplify the tax code, though he was adamantly against the flat tax when then-presidential candidate Steve Forbes proposed a 17% flat tax; Romney called this “tax cuts for fat cats.”

In the book, Romney also calls for tort reform, which would reduce the overhead for doctors and make medical care more affordable and result in the construction of new nuclear plants and higher teacher pay. Romney wants government to get out of the way and let entrepreneurs flourish, but he nevertheless has supported ethanol subsidies, a popular position in the all-important state of Iowa. The son of a former Michigan governor and automobile executive, Romney took a strong stand against the Obama administration’s automobile bailout, but he supported the Troubled Asset Relief Program (created in the last months of the George W. Bush administration) as necessary to prevent economic collapse.

Romney’s top economic advisers, now as in 2008, are Gregory Mankiw, a Harvard professor and former chairman of George W. Bush’s Council of Economic Advisers, and R. Glenn Hubbard, a Columbia University professor who served as chairman of Bush’s Council of Economic Advisers before Mankiw. Hubbard helped design the 2003 Bush tax cuts. Mankiw is also a prominent advocate of cutting taxes.

Former U.S. Sen. Jim Talent, R-Mo., who in the 1990s introduced legislation that ultimately led to many welfare recipients moving from complete dependence on welfare to work, is also a prominent member of the Romney economic team.

Mitchell, of the Cato Institute, described Romney’s record on taxes as “not terrible, but not pure.” As governor, Romney for the most part held the line on raising taxes, even when it might have been tempting to do so.

“Facing what was projected to be a near impossible budget deficit when he came into office,” Jim Stergios, executive director of the Pioneer Institute, a public-policy research organization in Massachusetts, said, “Romney never raised taxes. Everybody gives him kudos for that.”

Instead, Romney reset fees (such as court-filing fees) and closed various corporate tax loopholes. He attempted to cut state income tax from 5.3% to 5% but was blocked by the state Legislature. Romney did score a victory when the state Legislature tried to raise the capital-gains tax retroactively, and he stopped them after a bloody fight. Romney vetoed a bill to raise the minimum wage from \$6.75 to \$8, but he supports a minimum wage that is tied to economic benchmarks. He supported gambling as a way to raise revenue at one time, but backed off from that stance, citing the “social costs” of gaming.

“Gov. Romney was fairly pro-growth, and he kept spending down, which is astounding, considering he had a tax-and-spend Democratic Legislature,” said Keller, of the Club for Growth.

Peter Ferrara, of the Heartland Institute, however, is less sanguine. Ferrara said that the best social program for the poor and middle class is “economic growth and prosperity.” Romney, he added, is not the most pro-growth of the GOP candidates.

Romney has embraced the “cut, cap and balance” pledge put forth by conservative Republicans in the federal debt-ceiling debate that ended early this month. The initiative calls for budget cuts and caps on spending and a balanced budget amendment.

“While I appreciate the extraordinarily difficult situation President Obama’s lack of leadership has placed Republican members of Congress in, I personally cannot support this deal,” Romney said on Aug. 1, the day Congress voted on a painfully hammered-out deal to lift the debt ceiling.

Romney said that the deal reached by Obama and congressional leaders “opens the door” to raising taxes. Beyond that, however, the former Massachusetts governor didn’t offer Republicans in Congress an alternative or explain what he thought the outcome of not passing the deal would be for the nation’s finances.

*Register correspondent Charlotte Hays writes from Washington.*

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