



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on August 20, 2012

Romney-Ryan Campaign Okay with Abortion in Rape Cases

The Romney-Ryan campaign moved quickly August 19 to distance the presumptive Republican ticket from a comment by Rep. Todd Akin, the Republican U.S. Senate candidate in Missouri, who said that when pregnancy results from rape, the law should punish the rapist and not the unborn child.

“Governor Romney and Congressman Ryan disagree with Mr. Akin’s statement,” Romney campaign spokesperson [Amanda Henneberg](#) wrote in a statement quickly issued by the campaign. “A Romney-Ryan administration would not oppose abortion in instances of rape.”



In a campaign season dominated by Republican attacks on President Obama’s economic record and Democratic charges about Romney’s business practices and personal finances, Akin sparked renewed controversy with his answer in a TV [interview](#).

“It seems to me, from what I understand from doctors, that’s really rare,” Akin said in an interview aired by KTVI-TV, a Fox affiliate in St. Louis.” If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down. But let’s assume that maybe that didn’t work or something: I think there should be some punishment, but the punishment ought to be of the rapist, and not attacking the child.”

The TV station posted the interview on its web site and it drew sharp responses from Democrats as well as disavowals from Republicans. Sen. Claire McCaskill, the first-term incumbent Akin is opposing in the November election, responded with a Twitter Message. “As a woman & former prosecutor who handled 100s of rape cases, I’m stunned by Rep Akin’s comments about victims this AM.,” the Missouri Democrat wrote. In an interview with [National Review Online](#) August 20, Romney went beyond the statement his campaign issued August 19 and called Akin’s comments “inexcusable.”

“Congressman Akin’s comments on rape are insulting, inexcusable, and, frankly, wrong,” Romney said. “Like millions of other Americans, we found them to be offensive.”

What Akin meant by “legitimate rape” is unclear, though he may have meant a real rape, as opposed to a false claim made after consensual sex. But his use of the term “legitimate” and his claim that “a woman’s body has a way to shut that whole thing down” was obviously puzzling and embarrassing to the Republicans’ national campaign. After the candidate issued a statement acknowledging he “misspoke,” Brian Walsh, the communications director for the National Republican Senatorial Committee, put out a statement aimed at putting the controversy behind the candidate. “Congressman Akin did the right thing by quickly correcting the record and acknowledging that he misspoke,” Walsh wrote in an e-mail, adding that the Senate election in Missouri would be about McCaskill’s voting record and her support for the Obama agenda.

Romney’s stand on abortion has often put him at odds with the social conservatives who make up a substantial part of the Republican Party’s hard-core supporters. He has acknowledged being



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“effectively pro-choice” as a candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1994 and in the first part of his single term as governor of Massachusetts (2003-2007). His conversion to the pro-life cause came, he has said, when he had to consider a bill for stem-cell research, a measure he vetoed in 2005. Following the party platform, he now says he believes abortion should be outlawed, with exceptions in the case of rape or incest, as well as a threat to the life of the mother. While the exceptions may satisfy those in favor of allowing abortion only in the “hard cases,” it leaves unanswered the question of why the life of an innocent human being should be aborted because of the manner in which she or he is conceived — a point Akin reiterated in his follow-up statement.

“In reviewing my off-the-cuff remarks, it’s clear that I misspoke in this interview, and it does not reflect the deep empathy I hold for the thousands of women who are raped and abused every year,” Akin said in modifying his comments: “I recognize that abortion, and particularly in the case of rape, is a very emotionally charged issue. But I believe deeply in the protection of all life, and I do not believe that harming another innocent victim is the right course of action.”

Ryan, a seven-term congressman from Wisconsin and chairman of the House budget Committee, has taken a stronger anti-abortion stand than Romney. He won the seat for the first time in 1998, while opposing abortion in all cases except where the life of the mother was threatened. Last year he was co-sponsor of a bill defining human life as beginning with fertilization and affirming the rights of persons to human embryos.

“I’m outraged at the Republicans trying to take women back to the dark ages,” Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.), chairman of the Democratic National Committee, wrote in an e-mail Sunday. Schultz reminded readers that Romney has promised to “get rid of” federal funding for Planned Parenthood and that Ryan was one of 200 Republican co-sponsors in 2011 of an amendment to narrow the definition of rape in a bill to renew the ban on federal funding of abortions except in cases of rape, incest, or to save the life of the mother. The amendment, dropped from the final legislation, would have changed the rape exception to cases of “forcible rape,” a change supporters of the legislation said would prevent Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers from obtaining funding for abortions performed on minors by falsely claiming the girls were impregnated by adults in violation of statutory rape laws. Douglas Johnson, legislative director of the National Right to Life Committee, charged at the [time](#) that “the pro-abortion advocacy groups really are engaged in a brazen effort to greatly expand federal funding for abortion. They want to federally fund the abortion of tens of thousands of healthy babies of healthy moms, based solely on the age of their mothers.”

Highlighting Ryan’s stand on abortion has been part of the Democrats’ campaign strategy from the day Romney announced his choice of a running mate. “Make sure the women in your life know: Paul Ryan supports banning all abortions, even in cases of rape or incest,” the Obama campaign published in a Twitter message shortly after the announcement. The campaign may be less interested in reminding people that President Obama supports the right to abort for any reason at all, even for the sake of convenience, as long as it is a matter of “choice.”



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