

Why Is Mitt Romney Outraged at Todd Akin and Not at Paul Ryan?

Written by Michael B. Keegan
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Mitt Romney is outraged! He's insulted! He's offended!

Why? A Republican Senate candidate dared to state a position on choice that is exactly the same as that of Romney's own running mate.

Missouri Rep. Todd Akin is attracting plenty of attention for his bizarre and idiotic justification for refusing to allow rape victims to have abortions. But the extreme policy position behind those comments -- a policy that is the GOP standard -- should be getting just as much attention.

Akin explained this weekend how rape victims shouldn't be allowed reproductive choice because they already have access to some mysterious anti-pregnancy control system: "First of all, from what I understand from doctors [pregnancy from rape] is really rare. If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down."

Romney responded today in an interview with the National Review:

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

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"I have an entirely different view," Romney said. "What he said is entirely without merit and he should correct it."

What is Romney's "entirely different view"? That Rep. Akin doesn't have a basic understanding of the female anatomy that he's so interested in legislating? That Akin feels the need to draw a distinction between "legitimate rape" and "illegitimate rape"? That Akin thinks rape victims shouldn't be able to choose whether to carry their rapists' children?

Romney should start by directing his outrage at his own running mate. Rep. Paul Ryan not only opposes abortion rights for rape victims, he was a cosponsor of a so-called "personhood" amendment that would have classified abortion as first degree murder and outlawed common types of birth control. Ryan has also bought into the "legitimate rape" nonsense, cosponsoring legislation with Akin that would have limited federal services to victims of "forcible rape" -- a deliberate attempt to write out some victims of date rape and statutory rape.

Romney himself has flirted with the "personhood" idea, telling Mike Huckabee during the primary that he'd "absolutely" support such a measure. When he was later confronted about the comment at a town hall meeting, it became clear that Romney had no idea how the process he wanted to legislate actually worked.

And Romney hasn't always been keen to stand up for the victims of rape. In a Republican debate in February, he actually got in an argument with Newt Gingrich over who was least in favor of requiring hospitals to provide emergency contraception to rape victims they were treating.

Now the Romney campaign is trying to distance itself from Akin by saying that "a Romney-Ryan administration would not oppose abortion in instances of rape." But Romney has also vowed to nominate Supreme Court justices who would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, returning to states the power to outlaw or allow abortion as they choose. If Romney and anti-choice activists get their wish from the Supreme Court, a Romney-Ryan administration would have no power to stop states from imposing whichever abortion bans they decide to impose. The promise to carve out an exception for rape victims is not a promise they would be able to keep.

The real scandal of Rep. Akin's comments isn't the faulty sex-ed he's teaching. Instead, his

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comments expose the anti-choice movement's skewed and condescending view of women. Akin can't accept that a woman who fits his definition of virtue -- the victim of a "legitimate rape" -- would also need to seek an abortion, and he has made up false science to support that assumption. But with or without the weird right-wing science, that same false distinction underlies all anti-choice policies -- including those embraced by Romney and Ryan.

Romney can feign all the outrage he wants at Rep. Akin's misogynistic pseudo-science. But until he can draw a clear distinction between Akin's policies and his own, his protests will ring hollow.