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July 28, 2013: Pro-Life Liberalism

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Title: Pro-Life Liberalism

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7/28/2013—While this blog was suspended for travel, two items appeared in the media of what might be called Pro-Life Liberalism. In the first, Kurt Kondrich wrote in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on Wednesday, July 17, 2013, about a couple who advertised the pregnancy of a child with Down Syndrome. The couple apparently indicated that they wanted to give the child up for adoption but if they could not do so that the woman would seek an abortion. Kondrich reported that many people indicated a willingness to adopt this unborn child and that an adoption agency is now sifting through the applications.

In the second, a week ago, on Sunday, July 21, 2013, Ross Douthat wrote a column in the New York Times Sunday edition comparing the state of Texas and its proposed abortion restrictions with those of Western Europe. Surprisingly, he reported that the Texas proposed restrictions were similar to restrictions already imposed by France, Germany and Italy. He noted that critics of the Texas proposed restrictions have suggested that they would have deleterious effects on women. This does not seem to be the case in these countries, however.

But Douthat's major focus was on Ireland. Ireland has operated for many years with practically a complete ban on abortion. While this restriction has been recently expanded somewhat, on any indication of the welfare of women, Ireland ranks quite high.

Douthat then took his column in rather a strange or at least unexpected direction. He suggested that Ireland's experience did not justify Texas's restrictions. He raised the suggestion that the important difference between Texas and Ireland might have to do with universal healthcare, "which Rich Perry's state conspicuously lacks".

Here is how Douthat closed his column: "So perhaps, it might be argued, abortion can be safely limited only when the government does more to cover women's costs in other ways -- in which case Texas might still be flirting with disaster.

But note that this is a better argument for liberalism than for abortion.

It suggests, for instance, that liberal donors and activists should be spending more time rallying against Perry's refusal to take federal Medicaid financing than around Wendy Davis's famous filibuster.

It implies that the quest to 'turn Texas blue' should make economic policy rather than late-term abortion its defining issue

And it raises the possibility that a pro-life liberalism -- that once commonplace, now mythical persuasion -- would actually have a stronger argument to make than the one Texas's critics are making now."

Those of us who favor liberal economic policies and disfavor abortion have rarely made the case as well. And people who claim to be liberal, but whose focus has been more or less solely on abortion and not on care for the poor, have rarely been presented for such a compelling statement.