



Dodging the Bullet

BreakPoint with Charles Colson

November 18, 2002

Pro-Life Heroism in Congress

Earlier this year, bipartisan majorities in both houses of Congress passed a bankruptcy reform bill—a good bill. But instead of settling the issue, one member of the Senate, Charles Schumer of New York, held it hostage to his vendetta against the pro-life movement.

Schumer's amendment, in effect, denied bankruptcy rights to pro-life protesters. Everybody would be able to discharge debts from civil penalties by bankruptcy—except pro-life people.

If this bill passed, it would require somebody to go up on the scaffolding and chisel away from the entrance to the Supreme Court the words, "Equal justice under law." There would be one law for pro-life people and another law for everybody else.

Last Thursday night we dodged the bullet. There was an astonishing victory in the House. The House defeated a rule that was being sought to bring this bill up to a vote and instead passed a version of the bill without the Schumer amendment.

The sad part of this story is that the House Republican leadership, just reinstated with a healthy majority, caved in to pressure from the business community and was ready to bring this bill to a vote.

A lot of credit for this astonishing victory—that is, defeating the rule proposed by the House leadership—is due to Dr. Jim Dobson. On the radio, he rallied evangelicals across the country. The congressional switchboard was jammed on Thursday as people called their congressmen.

But the real heroes were pro-life congressmen who bucked their own leaders. Among them was Chris Smith, last year's Wilberforce award winner, and Joe Pitts of Pennsylvania, whom I've known as a close friend for twenty-seven years. He was one of the first volunteers in Prison Fellowship. Evangelicals and conservative Catholics rallied together, and they won.

I talked to Joe Pitts after the vote, and he said that while he didn't think they had the votes, miraculously

they seemed to appear as the voting was cast. God obviously moved in people's hearts. And when it was over, even the House leadership was pleased.

This is a wake-up call, showing us that we can't take anything for granted. The leadership of the House are all Christian evangelicals, and yet, when the crack opened between the economic conservatives and the moral conservatives, the leadership was forced to go against us. This is one of the reasons that I've argued that we should never put ourselves in the hip pocket of any party. Political parties will use you, even the best of them—and I happen to love the leaders in the House, but, in this case, I had to oppose them.

This whole battle over the bankruptcy bill points out how shaky the alliance is between economic conservatives and moral conservatives. They battled us over the Sudan Peace Act. They battled us over China and over trade issues.

But we've got to find ways to work together. They need us. Without the moral influence religious conservatives provide, our economic system doesn't work—it becomes crony capitalism. Remember Michael Novak's likening liberal democracy to a three-legged stool: The legs are economic freedom, political freedom, and moral truth. Knock one out, and the stool collapses.

I hope the House leaders have learned a good lesson from Thursday's vote: that it's wrong to buy economic favor at the expense of moral truth. And there's something else this victory on Thursday taught us. Many have said lately that Christians don't belong in the political process. Well, they're dead wrong. God's people were used last Thursday to protect justice in our land.

For further information:

BreakPoint Commentary No. 020919, "[A Bankrupt Bill: Bad News for Anti-Abortion Protesters.](#)"

Jim VandeHei and Kathleen Day, "[With Bankruptcy Bill, A Surprise Show of Force](#)," *The Washington Post*, November 16, 2002, A02.

Amy Fagan, "[Bankruptcy reform doomed in Senate](#)," *The Washington Times*, November 16, 2002.

William Wilberforce, [A Practical View of Christianity](#) (Hendrickson, 1996).

BreakPoint Commentary No. 020415, "[Sharks, Stools, and Secularism: Can We Prevent Another Enron?](#)"

Press release, "[Smith Honored with Wilberforce Award for Tireless Battles against Societal Injustice](#)," February 6, 2002.

