

# Recalling impact of Carter's support for Hyde Amendment



**Your Turn**  
Carol Crossed  
Guest columnist

The passing of President Jimmy Carter has propelled a national discussion about what is a progressive evangelical.

Carter's brand of Christianity challenged both the left and right to abandon political pressures that violated one's conscience. Stuart Eizenstat, Carter's domestic adviser, said the president took personal pride in ignoring the political consequences of decisions he regarded as principled.

Carter fulfilled his 1976 campaign promise, pardoning religious conscientious objectors in the Vietnam War who opposed killing. Carter's opposition to the death penalty was based on the biblical call to reject "an eye for an eye." Killing is not a principled solution to solving a problem.

One of Carter's most enduring and controversial legacies is the enforcement of the Hyde Amendment which

prevents government money from being used for abortions. Carter took the self-identified "pro-choice" proponents at face value: It was a woman's decision to have one and therefore to pay for one, not the government's.

Far from being a misogynist, the president had a record 38 women on his White House staff, including Rochester's own Vice-Mayor Midge Costanza. Because I was an anti-war activist, I supported Midge's passion to get Carter elected.

It was no surprise that Carter named Costanza to be his public liaison. But it was a surprise when she brought women to the Capitol to lobby the president against the Amendment. Carter was no bartering horse-trader. His adamant support for Hyde helped lead to Costanza's departure from her White House post. Carter's leadership played a role in shaping Democratic Party opinion, but was also a reflection of it.

Like today, early pro-life democratic feminists advocated non-violent solutions to the "feminization of poverty," a phrase actually coined by the Carter administration. Economic inequality could not be solved by the government

aborting poor women's children.

The party platform's stated protection of the 'vulnerable' was understood to be in conflict with support for abortion. The party was reminded of that In 1976 by pro-life candidate Ellen McCormack. She ran in 19 state primaries and captured 22 delegates at the 1976 Democratic National Convention.

In 2024, protecting the "vulnerable" was mentioned 10 times in the Democratic Party's platform. Ironically, Democrats spent a whopping \$149 million on ads that promoted abortion-rights, more than for health care or the economy or crime or human rights.

While Carter did not publicly support overturning *Roe v Wade*, he condemned abortion throughout his political career. Today, support for the Hyde Amendment continues. Only 36% of Americans support funding abortions.

In a 2021 poll, 78% of Democrats said they believe laws can protect the health and well-being of mothers and the life of the pre-born child.

I think Jimmy Carter would like that.

*Carol Crossed is vice president of the board of directors of Feminists Choosing Life of New York.*

## CORRECTIONS

- In an opinion column published Jan. 12 and titled “Recalling impact of Carter’s support for Hyde Amendment,” the amount spent on abortion rights ads by Democrats in 2024 was listed incorrectly. It was \$571 million.
  - After today’s Opinion section went to press, it was decided because of a cold weather forecast to move President-Elect Donald Trump’s inauguration on Monday indoors. Therefore, some details in Mike Kelly’s column today describing plans for an outdoor inauguration are outdated.
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