

# THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

*Why the Democrats are moving toward compromise.*

BY PETER J. BOYER

As Democrats regrouped after last year's elections, Senator Charles Schumer, of New York, the chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, took up the task of preventing further Republican gains in 2006. The Democrats' cause had been reduced to forty-five votes in the Senate, the Party's smallest share in more than sixty years; losing just a few additional seats would give Republicans a filibuster-proof majority.

Schumer had to find money for Democratic incumbents whose seats were at risk and to recruit and fund candidates who might be capable of defeating targeted Republicans. Last winter, as he got started, he almost immediately identified the prize he most coveted. "Both on the substance and on the politics," Schumer recalls, "when we sat down and looked at the map we said our No. 1 take-back seat would be Pennsylvania"—the seat now held by the state's junior senator, Rick Santorum. A fiercely partisan religious conservative, Santorum is to the Democrats the very embodiment of the scary right; his aspirations for national office only heighten the allure of defeating him.

Schumer solicited the advice of Edward G. Rendell, the governor of Pennsylvania and the former head of the national Party: "I said, 'Governor, who can beat Santorum? Is he vulnerable, and who can beat him?'"

Rendell had already gamed out the field. "There's only one guy who can beat him," Rendell said, according to Schumer. "But he doesn't want to run, and you guys wouldn't want him even if he did."

"If he could win, why wouldn't we want him?"

"Well, he's not pro-choice."

Rendell's ideal candidate was Robert Casey, Jr., who had just been elected state treasurer, receiving the largest number of votes in Pennsylvania's history. Rendell did not need to explain why Casey might have been hesitant to run for any office

that required the acquiescence of the national Party. Schumer knew what had happened at the 1992 Democratic National Convention, in New York City.

Casey is a legacy politician in Pennsylvania, the son of Robert P. Casey, Sr., who for most of thirty-five years, starting in the early nineteen-sixties, seemed always to be running for one statewide office or another. The senior Casey was an Irish Democrat pol of the old school, the son and grandson of miners, who championed labor and believed in government as a beneficent force. In a state that reveres deer-hunting, he was gun-friendly. He was also pro-life.

In 1992, Casey was at the summit of his political career. He had won a second term as governor by carrying all but one of Pennsylvania's sixty-seven counties. His programs had forced insurance companies to pay for mammograms for middle-aged women, and had brought full-day child-care services to working parents and health insurance to children whose parents were above the poverty line but too poor to pay medical bills. But Casey was at least equally well known as the defendant in a legal case that had gone to the United States Supreme Court. In his first term, he had fostered and signed into law the Pennsylvania Abortion Control Act, which placed significant limitations on abortion, including the notification of parents of minors, a twenty-four-hour waiting period, and a ban on partial-birth procedures except in cases of risk to the mother's life. Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania sued the state, with Casey as the named defendant, asserting that several provisions of the law violated the right to privacy established by *Roe v. Wade*. The case made its way to the Supreme Court, which heard arguments in April, 1992—occasioning an enormous pro-choice march in Washington. The Court decided *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* on June 29th, upholding all of Pennsylvania's contested restrictions

but one (a requirement for spousal notification) and affirming the right of states to restrict abortions.

Two weeks later, the Democratic Convention began. As the head of the Pennsylvania delegation, Casey hoped to make a grand gesture from the podium on behalf of the pro-life position. He imagined himself in the role of passionate dissenter, as the young Hubert Humphrey had been when he spoke for civil rights at the 1948 Convention. Casey had written to Ron Brown, the chairman of the national Party, asking for the chance to share his often expressed view that “young mothers and their children were the natural constituency of the Party,” and that “abortion-on-demand was no solution,” for women or for the Party. But Casey had chosen the wrong occasion for speaking out. Democrats had been out of power for a dozen years, and, sensing victory with Bill Clinton (who had not received Casey’s endorsement), they staged the most disciplined Convention in Party history. Dissent on any subject—especially on the Party’s core position on choice—was strictly written out of the program. Brown never responded to Casey’s request. At the Convention, Casey presented another plea, in a letter hand-delivered to Ann Richards, the Convention’s chairwoman. She didn’t respond directly, either. Instead, Casey was copied on a letter from a Convention parliamentarian to the Party’s general counsel, denying Casey’s request. (“The kind of letter they might have sent Lyndon LaRouche,” he later observed.)

Denied the podium, Casey watched as a succession of speakers pronounced themselves pro-choice, to lively applause. Among them were six Republican women, who had been invited by the National Abortion Rights Action League, or NARAL. One had actively worked for Casey’s Republican opponent in his last campaign. On the Convention’s final night, the gathering was invited to join hands and sing “Circle of Friends” (“Let’s join a circle of friends, one that begins and never ends”). Casey and his family, consigned to seats in the far reaches of Madison Square Garden, declined to join in. Casey turned to his wife, Ellen, and said, “Let’s remember this moment. One day, it’s all going to come back around.”

Twelve years later, Casey was dead, Democrats were a minority in Congress,

a pro-life evangelical lived in the White House, and Robert Casey, Jr., was being proposed as the Party’s best chance in its marquee senatorial contest. Schumer studied the 2004 election results in Pennsylvania, and was impressed. The younger Casey—known as Bobby in Pennsylvania political circles—had won his treasurer’s race by some 1.3 million votes,

Maybe if we had sixty-five seats we could afford to do that. But we don’t.”

**B**obby Casey grew up in Democratic politics, and he was at his father’s side in Madison Square Garden in 1992. “He had just been reelected by over a million votes,” he told me. “It was a mistake not to let him speak.”



*In Pennsylvania, Rick Santorum will face the pro-life Democrat Robert Casey, Jr.*

four hundred thousand more than John Kerry received there. Furthermore, Casey won not only in conservative precincts of the state but also in pro-choice, pro-gun-control Philadelphia.

Schumer told Rendell that he was backing Casey, and that Rendell should do all he could to clear the field of other candidates. “I said, ‘Ed, look, we have forty-five seats in the Senate—our backs are against the wall,’” Schumer recalls. “And if we go down to forty-two seats it’s over. The very hard right will run America. We can’t afford to play games anymore. This is tough stuff. Democrats have to be a bigger-tent Party. And the day should be over when a potential candidate has to check twenty-seven boxes before we support him.

Some Party leaders tried to make amends. The day after the Convention, Al Gore telephoned the senior Casey and explained that neither he nor Clinton had been responsible for the banishment. After Casey died, in 2000, Gore invited Bobby and his brother Pat, a lawyer who is also involved in Pennsylvania politics, to address that summer’s Convention and to present a video tribute to their father. “I thought that was a very important gesture,” Casey says. “I think it symbolized a journey that the Party had travelled just in eight years.”

Still, Schumer says, when he and Rendell urged Bobby Casey to challenge Santorum, Casey hesitated. He was his father’s son regarding abortion, and NARAL had campaigned against him in the past;



*"So we figured why explore Mars when, closer to home, there's still so much we don't know about the Petersens."*

he knew that, without the pro-choice activists supporting him, money would be an issue against the well-financed incumbent. "He was very concerned that someone of his view could not get support from Democrats," Schumer says.

There was another complication. Emily's List, the pro-choice advocacy group that funds and helps to coordinate campaigns for Democratic women, had already chosen a candidate for the race—a veteran statewide campaigner named Barbara Hafer, Casey's predecessor as state treasurer. Emily's List, which spent twenty-six million dollars on pro-choice candidates in 2004, had been working with Hafer for several months; after Hafer announced her candidacy, in February, Emily's List dispatched a pair of staffers to Pennsylvania to help set up her campaign. When Casey made it clear that he didn't want a primary fight, against Hafer or anyone else, Rendell asked Hafer to withdraw. "The Governor called and said, 'Look, Bob wants to do this, and I'm being called by Chuck Schumer,'" Hafer says. "I guess Bobby Casey just had more gravitas than I did." Hafer withdrew from the race on March 4th, and Casey announced his candidacy that day.

Abortion-rights activists and feminist groups, Schumer's customary allies, were dismayed. With the backing of Eleanor

Smeal, Gloria Steinem, and other longtime feminists, Kim Gandy, the head of the National Organization for Women, sent out a mass e-mail to supporters:

Who did top Democrats pick to run against Santorum, one of the leading anti-abortion, anti-women's rights and anti-gay senators?...Robert P. Casey Jr., a staunch abortion opponent in the mold of his father, the late Pennsylvania Governor Bob Casey Sr. You may recognize his name from the 1992 Supreme Court case of Casey v. Planned Parenthood....Don't mistake this for a random act—it is a calculated effort by Party leaders to build a so-called "bigger tent" at the expense of women's rights.... We must let the Democrats know that women will no longer be taken for granted: When Democrats do not support women, we will not support them.

Please also forward this message to as many of your friends and family as possible. We must send a constant stream of e-mail petitions flowing to the Democratic leaders—perhaps they have forgotten about the power of women's votes and the gender gap, but we have not.

Schumer had several long, angry conversations with his old friend Kate Michelman, the former president of NARAL, and found himself reminding her and others of his own abortion-rights record. He brought Casey to Washington and assured his colleagues that Casey as senator would vote the right way on President Bush's judicial nominees. "There's no worry on judges," Schumer says. "And judges is the whole ball of wax." In these

conversations, Schumer's clincher was the polling data from Pennsylvania. One Quinnipiac University poll showed Hafer trailing Santorum by eight points; the same poll showed Casey ahead of Santorum by five. "The bottom line for them is they want to win Senate races," Karen White, the national political director for Emily's List, who was one of those lobbied by Schumer, says. "Chuck Schumer, in his first term as head of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, wants to walk away from 2006 with four Senate races under his belt."

For White and other pro-choice activists, Democratic talk of a big tent was becoming alarmingly familiar as the Party dealt with what amounted to a case of "values" shock—the post-election impression that Democrats keep losing because they have lost touch with mainstream American values. A month after conceding the election to Bush last year, John Kerry stopped in at a meeting of America Votes, a coalition of progressive activist groups. Kerry said that the Party needed to rethink how it presented itself to voters on issues like abortion, and that pro-life Democrats should be embraced. "People in the room openly disagreed," White recalls. "You don't just throw out words or issues to come up with an excuse for why you lost." Her group then commissioned a study showing that abortion wasn't the reason Kerry lost.

But Kerry's larger point was hard to refute. The Democrats' pro-choice position had come to be perceived as pro-abortion. Most Americans favor legal abortion, but with reservations; the vast majority favor some restrictions on the procedure. Democrats are seen as the abortion-on-demand party because of the strategies employed in the political wars between pro-life and pro-choice advocates. After *Roe v. Wade*, abortion opponents eventually settled on the strategy of constricting abortion incrementally, focussing on such issues as parental notification, informed consent, and partial-birth abortions. This forced the pro-choice side, fearing the slippery slope, to oppose any and all restrictions on a woman's right to choose to have an abortion, as established by *Roe*. Without a Supreme Court reversal, or a constitutional ban on abortion—neither very likely—these strategies guaranteed the abortion issue a lasting place in American politics, a chronic low-grade

fever that afflicted Democrats more than Republicans. In the years after Roe, pro-choice forces gradually became the Democrats' most important, and insistent, interest sector, raising money and turning out votes and, accordingly, gaining greater influence over the Party's positions.

In 1976, the first Presidential election year after the Roe decision, the Democratic platform opposed a constitutional ban on abortion, but also included the statement "We fully realize the religious and ethical nature of the concerns which many Americans have on the subject of abortion." Jimmy Carter was nominated by that year's Convention, and became the last Democrat to win a voter majority. Carter, a Southerner and a born-again Christian, was pro-choice but opposed government funding of abortion. In time, the abortion-rights wing gained influence, and the Party adopted a position of supporting government funding of abortions. The Democratic line grew gradually more rigid and its tone less subtle, until it sounded something like an applause line. (Last year's platform stated, "We stand proudly for a woman's right to choose.") The Democratic strategist Paul Begala, who worked for the senior Casey, says, "Somehow, we moved from Carter, who was really pro-choice but very much

sensitive to the tragedy, to now, where we're dancing in the aisles about it."

Democratic politicians felt such little leeway on the subject that the ranks of dissidents inevitably thinned. "When you're running for statewide office as a Democrat, and you're talking with people and trying to raise money, there's no doubt that, if you take a view different from the choice community on abortion, you have a lot of explaining to do," says Bill Ritter, the pro-life former district attorney of Denver, who is running for governor of Colorado. Prominent state Democrats have been slow to endorse Ritter, even though he is the only Democrat in the race. At the time of Roe, nearly half the Democrats in Congress were pro-life; now there are some thirty pro-life Democrats in the House and fewer than half a dozen in the Senate. Tim Roemer, a pro-life former Democratic congressman from Indiana, blames what he calls the Party's pro-choice "litmus test" for steady Democratic losses in the South, the West, and the Midwest. "Instead of having pro-life Democrats who would vote for a Democratic Speaker and vote for programs to help the poor, you replace them with Republicans who went far, far to the conservative, Falwell-Robertson right," Roemer says.

Democratic officeholders find themselves expected to vote against even those abortion restrictions that most of their constituents consider reasonable. No one knows this better than John Kerry, a Roman Catholic who found himself professing his belief that life begins at conception, even while defending his vote against a ban on partial-birth abortion. "Look at the 2004 Presidential primaries," Begala says. "Nine candidates. All of them not only embraced the right to legal abortion; they embraced legal so-called partial-birth abortion—including folks like Kucinich and Gephardt, who'd voted to ban partial-birth abortion. Kucinich had an unblemished pro-life record until five minutes before he started to run for President."

What galls Democrats like Tim Roemer is that, even though the Republican core is as doctrinaire on abortion as the Democratic base is, Republicans have managed to create an impression of tolerance for differing opinions within the Party. "As the nineteen-nineties progressed, the Republicans, at least symbolically, became more of the big-tent party, with pro-choice governors, mayors, people like Giuliani and Schwarzenegger, highlighting their versatility on this issue," Roemer says. "The Democratic Party veered toward putting the flaps down on the tent. They're steered more by some of these special-interest groups, and, not being able to elect some of the pro-life Democrats in districts, we lost to Republicans." Roemer speaks from unhappy experience. A few weeks after Kerry gave his talk to America Votes, and as Schumer was trying to sell Party activists on the idea of the pro-life Casey, Roemer launched a campaign to become chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He ran on a platform of national security (he had served on the 9/11 Commission), tolerance of differing views on abortion, and a return to traditional Democratic values. He pointed to the fact that Democrats had lost ninety-six of the hundred fastest-growing counties in the nation—an unpromising trend for a party trying to regain majority status. Roemer was vigorously opposed by pro-choice activists, who lined up behind Howard Dean's successful candidacy. "I had some pretty piercing and nasty opposition research done on me in the D.N.C. race that I don't think the Republicans had



*"Psst. Is everyone still mad at me?"*

done quite so well in my six races for the House of Representatives," Roemer says.

But the last election prompted even some pro-choice activists to begin to reconsider the absolutist strategy. In an influential essay published last November, Frances Kissling, a co-founder of the National Abortion Federation and the long-time head of Catholics for a Free Choice, allowed that the abortion-rights movement's focus on a woman's right to choose has come at the cost of a seeming indifference to the value of fetal life. "I am deeply struck by the number of thoughtful, progressive people," she wrote, "who have been turned off to the pro-choice movement by the lack of adequate and clear expressions of respect for fetal life, people who are themselves grappling with the conflict between upholding women's rights and the right to conscience and respecting the value of nascent human life." Noting the movement's inability "to express any doubt about any aspect of abortion," Kissling proposed that "we would do well as pro-choice people to present abortion as a complex issue that involves loss—and to be saddened by that loss at the same time as we affirm and support women's decisions to end pregnancies. Is there not a way to simply say, 'Yes, it is sad, unfortunate, tragic (or whatever word you are comfortable with) that this life could not come to fruition?'"

Two months later, Hillary Rodham Clinton met with the annual conference of Family Planning Advocates of New York State. "We can all recognize that abortion in many ways represents a sad, even tragic choice to many, many women," Mrs. Clinton said. Regarding those who oppose abortion, she said, "I, for one, respect those who believe with all their hearts and conscience that there are no circumstances under which any abortion should ever be available."

If there is a place that describes Democratic disappointment, and the Party's motivation for adjusting its image, it is Cambria County, in the rolling Allegheny landscapes of western Pennsylvania. Its main city is Johnstown, which was made and broken by the Rust Belt industries of coal and steel. "This place is seventy per cent Roman Catholic, ninety per cent Democrat, and a hundred per cent union," Craig Ford, a local banker, says. That may be an exaggeration, but at Ford's bank

even the tellers belong to a union—the United Steelworkers. Cambria County is a place where people hunt deer and send their sons into military service, but register as Democrats. They could be called Reagan Democrats, except that these Democrats didn't vote for Reagan. Registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by a two-to-one margin. But in the 2004 election Cambria County went for Bush, in what may have been the biggest party crossover vote in the nation; it was the first time the county had voted Republican in a Presidential contest in more than thirty years.

It was voters like those in Cambria County, where unemployment is high and near-term prospects for recovery are low, who most frustrated Democrats, because they seemed to be voting against their own interests. Bob Kerrey, the former Democratic senator from Nebraska, believes that the Party lost Main Street by allowing itself to be identified so vividly as the antiwar, anti-gun, pro-abortion party. "They no longer trusted our values," he says. "They thought our values were different. They thought we were disdainful of their patriotism, of their religion, of their orientation in their community."

Charles Schumer believes that Robert Casey, Jr., is a remedy for that problem, at least in Pennsylvania. The strategy is uncomplicated: Casey's positions on guns and abortion, it is hoped, will neutralize Santorum's edge in those parts of the state which vote according to traditional values, allowing him to draw distinctions with Santorum on issues that favor Democrats, such as Social Security. Barbara Hafer, who was pressed out of the race to make way for Casey, concedes, "The strategy is correct—the issue of choice is neutralized, and other issues will come forward."

Hafer is able to view the race, despite her own disappointment, with the detached, almost amused air of one who has seen much in Pennsylvania politics, and from nearly every perspective. Now

in her sixties, she was for thirty years a pro-choice Republican, and an abiding presence in the commonwealth's electoral politics. A former nurse, she was twice elected state treasurer and served two terms as state auditor general (a position also held by both Caseys). In 1990, she was the Republican gubernatorial candidate, trying to unseat the incumbent, Robert Casey, Sr. (It was a supporter of Hafer's, Kathy Taylor, whose speech at the 1992 Democratic Convention had so chagrined Governor Casey.) Three years ago, Hafer endorsed the Democrat Rendell for governor, and shortly thereafter she became a Democrat herself, joining a party in which, at last, her pro-choice position was not the minority view. With Rendell's encouragement, she began to eye the Santorum race. When the Democrats decided that what they needed was Casey, an abortion opponent, she was, of course, skeptical of the strategy. "I didn't initially think that the taking away of the choice issue would work the way it's worked," she says. "But Bob's numbers are great." She says she's now convinced that Casey can win.

The strategy was on display one evening late this summer, when Casey travelled to Johnstown to mingle with voters at a large annual picnic, held at a hard-scrabble park overlooking an urban ravine. After a band played Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A.," the locals drank beer as Casey recited his stump speech, a generalized critique of the ways in which Republicans in Washington have failed average Pennsylvanians. He said that Santorum had voted for tax breaks for the wealthy, while serving as point man for President Bush's "scheme" to undermine Social Security. (Pennsylvania has the country's third-highest percentage of old people.) Lean and balding, with his father's dark beetle brows, Casey is an unimposing presence, and his campaign style is not dynamic; his handlers hope that he will contrast well with Santorum's more heated displays.

Casey doesn't volunteer his positions on abortion and guns, as his father might have, but in Pennsylvania the Casey view on abortion is a given. When prompted on the so-called life issues, Casey does not equivocate: he will vote to limit abortion. When asked about the medical possibilities of embryonic-stem-cell research, Casey, the father of four daughters, says,



"My father suffered from familial amyloidosis"—a hereditary disease—"which killed him. I understand what those families go through, and how they feel a sense of hopelessness about cures and finding cures for diseases. And that's why I support embryonic-stem-cell research in cases where you don't destroy the embryo. And I think there are an awful lot of promising scientific techniques now that will allow us to have the benefits of embryonic-stem-cell research. But I don't think we should be destroying embryos to do that."

"You'll kick his ass," one supporter assured Casey, patting him on the back. Asked to expand his analysis, the Casey advocate, a deputy sheriff named Bob Tutko, explained, "He walks on water here. This time, we've got a candidate on the Democratic side that is pro-life."

John Brabender, a consultant to Rick Santorum's reelection campaign, allows that "in the western part of the state there's a large group of Reagan Democrats who often swing their votes to Republicans, based on two issues: guns and abortion." But neutralizing those issues may also work in Santorum's favor, Brabender suggests, in allowing Casey to be depicted on other issues as a "traditional tax-and-spend Democrat." (Santorum declined to discuss the race, because, according to Brabender, "he doesn't want to be in the position of playing political analyst in his own race, or to render opinion on his opponent.")

The key question for Casey is whether he can excite the enthusiasm of Party activists in the metropolitan centers of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. "That's where the money's been raised, in the pro-choice, progressive community," Barbara Hafer says. "So where do *they* go? Is everybody going to sit on their hands? It'll be very interesting." Paul Begala, who is expected to join Casey's campaign, knows the difficulties in bucking Party orthodoxy. Begala managed Harris Wofford's 1991 Senate campaign. As a member of the senior Casey's cabinet, Wofford had supported the Abortion Control Act. "We had the hardest time raising money," Begala says, "because even having the slightest deviation was lethal." In 1994, Wofford lost to Rick Santorum.

Despite Schumer's assurances that "there's no worry on judges," Casey says

that he would have voted to confirm John Roberts as Chief Justice of the United States. "I don't think that when you're voting for a judicial nominee you should impose any litmus test on that nominee," he told me.

Casey has not yet revealed his view of President Bush's latest Supreme Court choice, Judge Samuel A. Alito, Jr., but the nomination has provided a new reminder of the lasting place the name Casey has in abortion politics. In a 1991 opinion rendered in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, Alito, who was a new member of the federal appellate court at the time, voted with his colleagues in upholding most of Pennsylvania's restrictions on abortion, but he dissented from the court's holding that one provision of the law, which required a woman to notify her spouse before undergoing an abortion, presented women with an "undue burden."

Governor Casey had drafted the provision carefully, in light of the Supreme Court's reasoning on undue burden in earlier cases, and Alito observed in his dissent that only twenty to thirty per cent of women seeking abortions were married, and that ninety-five per cent of them notified their husbands; he also noted that the Pennsylvania law eased the burden of notification by granting exceptions—for instance, in those cases in which a woman feared harm might result from informing her spouse of her intention. In the heat of confirmation debate, that history was distilled down to talking points, and the Casey decision again became a hot button.

Bobby Casey has been dispatched to meet with hesitant potential donors, including many pro-choice activists, to persuade them that he's a safe investment. Many were not wholly convinced. "There are things he won't be good on," Elizabeth Werthan, a progressive Democratic activist in Philadelphia, said. "We don't know all of it, but we know some of it. It's abortion, it's gun control—he's already got a record on gun control, and he's not changing anything he said. That was a very bitter pill for a lot of folks who are more progressive. I mean, he just wouldn't split the middle. He would not move."

Werthan said that although Casey promised to buck Church teaching on contraceptives and support birth-control

programs, he remained adamantly opposed to most embryonic-stem-cell research. "The sacred embryo," Werthan mused. "I still don't get it."

But, among such potential supporters, Casey's cause is helped immeasurably by the profile of his opponent. It has been an awkward early campaign season for Santorum, starting with his book, "It Takes a Family," which argues the case for traditional family values by seeming to take shots at working mothers. ("For some parents, the purported need to provide *things* for their children simply provides a convenient rationalization for pursuing a gratifying career outside the home," he wrote.) Venturing into the hazardous sphere of the Catholic Church's sexual-abuse scandal, Santorum observed on a trip to Boston this summer that "it is no surprise that Boston, a seat of academic, political, and cultural liberalism in America, lies at the center of the storm." And, because he is the third-ranking Republican in the Senate, Santorum, who has hinted at an interest in national office, has been associated with the downward trend of the President's popularity numbers.

John Brabender, Santorum's campaign adviser, acknowledges that his candidate is burdened by the "baggage" of incumbency, and that the early poll numbers reflect the "bizarre caricature" that has settled upon Santorum in the years since his last campaign, in 2000. "Rick Santorum is profiled in the press as this George Bush, ultra-conservative, right-wing, ultra-pro-life Republican," Brabender says. Once the campaign begins in earnest, he added, it will work to counter his unfavorable rating by, among other things, telling voters that this year's *National Journal* ranking of senators did not include Santorum among the twenty most conservative. "There's a lot of things about Rick Santorum that are surprising," Brabender says. "He has an incredible record of legislation on fighting poverty, world AIDS, hunger, preserving open spaces—all these things that we've found time and time again, in testing with voters, that they're very surprised about. It seems very contrary to the Rick Santorum they always read about. That's the problem when you only run every six years—you only get to tell your side of the story every six years."

The fact remains that when Schumer

was selling the idea of Casey's candidacy to Beltway Democrats, polls showed Casey leading Santorum by five points. By early summer, that gap had reached seven points, then thirteen. A poll taken in October showed Casey's lead over Santorum at eighteen points.

That may be why Democratic activists are beginning to sign on. Werthan says that the women in her circle, many of them new to politics, are as motivated by their desire to turn out Santorum as they are by abortion politics. "They are crazy over getting rid of Santorum," she says. "He scares them to death. I think they sort of woke up and said, 'Oh, my God! Nuts!' I think that they saw his ambitions unfold, and they saw that he was headed toward trying to run for President."

Kimberly C. Oxholm, a Democratic activist who is associated with Planned Parenthood, says that she and some of her friends have begun to develop a rationale for supporting an anti-abortion Democrat. "I'm beginning to feel comfortable," she says. "I think a lot of us are. Thinking about it nationally, Bob Casey is going to be, we hope, a member of the Democratic majority. That alone is going to be hugely beneficial for reproductive rights and women. He said he's not going to Washington to push an anti-abortion agenda. He'll be, hopefully, part of a majority, and he'll vote with people like Harry Reid"—the Democratic leader in the Senate. "Reid's not wonderful on abortion, either, but he's really good on all the family-planning stuff. Hopefully, there won't be any major vote coming up where he'll have to vote differently."

Even so, it is a measured enthusiasm. Oxholm's local Planned Parenthood affiliate is the one that was involved in the Supreme Court case over the senior Casey's Abortion Control Act. Oxholm says that she has given the maximum donation to Casey's campaign, but she adds, "I have to say, it was hard." She eased into making the donation, she says, by first deciding "that it was all right for my husband to write him a check."

"I was peripherally involved when Harris Wofford lost to Santorum," she says. "I feel somewhat guilty. I wouldn't give Wofford money, because he wasn't absolutely perfect on the choice issue—and look what we got." ♦