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To: Interested Parties

From: NARAL Pro-Choice America Research Team

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Memo: Anti-Choice Candidates Mislead, Manipulate, and Move Goalposts Around Abortion During the 2022 Midterm Elections

The 2022 midterm elections have given anti-choice candidates the opportunity to unleash deceptive and dangerous narratives about reproductive freedom and laid bare the anti-choice movement's agenda of amassing power and control. This cycle saw the proliferation of vigilante-enforced abortion bans, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, an onslaught of state bans on abortion, and the introduction of a national abortion ban, among other anti-choice assaults on reproductive freedom. These heightened stakes demanded that U.S. House and Senate hopefuls stand firm in their commitment to abortion rights and access—especially in light of the anti-choice movement's efforts to distract the public from the [harm](#) of its oppressive policies. Anti-choice candidates in key races have [misled](#) voters about their true position on reproductive freedom, manipulated the public through [medical disinformation](#), and moved the goalposts in the wake of the *Dobbs* decision to reflect the anti-choice movement's real endgame of [banning](#) and [criminalizing](#) abortion care.

Lies, Misdirects, and Pivots to Obscure Anti-Choice Extremism

Knowing that the vast majority of voters support the legal right to abortion, Republican candidates deliberately deceived voters about the anti-choice movement's extreme ideology and objectives in order to maintain voter appeal. [Several candidates claimed](#) to [oppose federal restrictions](#) on abortion care—despite [previous support](#) for national bans or [amending the](#) U.S. Constitution to ban abortion—to [mislead voters](#) about their intentions.

These pivots underscore the disingenuousness of anti-choice candidates this cycle who purported to want to "[return decisions](#) related to [abortion](#) back to the [states](#)." The anti-choice narrative of supporting [state jurisdiction](#) over abortion care because it [uplifts voters' voices](#) and [empowers](#) "[the people](#)" over "[nine unelected judges](#)" is a white, patriarchal sham. These professions purposely [downplay](#) the anti-choice movement's capacity to enact restrictive policies given its [outsized control over state](#) legislatures as well as the impacts of gerrymandering and voter suppression. [New Hampshire Republican Senate candidate Don Bolduc](#) said the quiet part out loud: the anti-choice movement believes decisions on abortion access "belong" to "gentlemen" in state legislatures, not pregnant people.

Anti-choice candidates have also sought to distract from their out-of-touch, anti-freedom agenda through [bogus hedging](#) of their position. Several anti-choice politicians touted their [support](#) for [exceptions](#) to bans on abortion care in [cases](#) of risk to the pregnant person's [health](#) to inoculate against allegations of misogyny. However, despite these candidates' false claims of being "[pro-woman](#)," [they deny](#) abortion bans' [harm](#) on [people's](#) health, support [fake](#)



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[health](#) centers that [coerce](#) and [deceive](#) pregnant people, and refuse to strengthen social safety nets. These congressional hopefuls have predictably [called their opponents](#) “[extreme](#)” in order to [deflect from](#) their own regressive policies.

Amplifying Disinformation to Confuse Voters

In hopes of controlling the public’s perception of abortion and drawing in conflicted voters, anti-choice candidates served as purveyors of medical disinformation around abortion care. They sought to drown out science with a barrage of [biased propaganda](#) to [confuse](#) voters about abortion care and make anti-choice, extreme positions more palatable.

Congressional hopefuls most [regularly amplified disinformation](#) about abortion [care later](#) in [pregnancy](#) and [the provision](#) of [palliative care](#) to [fearmonger](#) around “[infanticide](#).” They also attempted to alienate voters from the reproductive freedom movement by erroneously asserting that the Women’s Health Protection Act (WHPA) would “[mandate](#),” “[require](#),” “[publicly fund](#),” or “[legalize](#)” “[abortion until the point of birth](#).” Contrary to these legal falsehoods and unscientific fabrications, [WHPA](#) would *protect the right to access abortion care* free from bans and medically unnecessary restrictions. Additionally, some candidates [elevated disinformation](#) around fetal development and falsely claimed that “[science affirmed](#)” anti-choice ideology defining when life begins—a tactic that decenters the pregnant person in an attempt to criminalize abortion.

Exposing the True Anti-Choice Endgame

This cycle, right-wing candidates unveiled how the anti-choice movement will forge ahead with their ultimate agenda: a total nationwide abortion ban and [overhaul](#) of the legal definition of “[personhood](#)” to include fertilized eggs, embryos, and fetuses, with the intent of criminalizing abortion. Many anti-choice candidates [supported](#) Sen. Graham’s 15-week [federal ban](#), falsely [framing](#) it as “[totally reasonable](#)” and “[moderate](#)” to capture the support of voters. But the anti-choice movement will not stop at this ban, and some [candidates](#) went so far as to [endorse](#) nationwide bans [earlier](#) in pregnancy as well as a [total federal ban](#).

Moreover, anti-choice U.S. Senate and House contenders called for a “[federal personhood law](#)” and “[legal protection](#)” for fetuses [under the 14th Amendment](#), which not only would criminalize abortion but could also ban birth control, assisted reproductive technology like IVF, and stem cell [research](#). Candidates signaled toward this next frontier of criminalization by opposing [IVF](#), [contraceptive rights](#), and [protections](#) from prosecution for people ending a pregnancy or experiencing pregnancy loss.

Though anti-choice politicians worked to distort and control public debate on abortion care, we must mobilize the reproductive freedom majority and protect and elect champions. It is imperative that the reproductive freedom movement lead the conversation on abortion care and reclaim a narrative centered on pregnant people, medical consensus, and compassion to stop the anti-choice disinformation infrastructure from filling narrative vacuums.