

OPPOSITION NOTES

AN INVESTIGATIVE SERIES ON THOSE WHO OPPOSE
WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

The American Life League: “More interested in making a statement than making a difference”

I INTRODUCTION

The American Life League is on the right wing of the antichoice movement, marginalized and isolated even among ostensible allies. Although ALL has made many ambitious statements of intent since it was founded some 25 years ago, it has failed to deliver on many of its promises and has attracted sharp criticism for apparent financial missteps.

So extreme are ALL's views on abortion and other subjects that it has regularly denounced such reliable conservatives as George W. Bush and Rush Limbaugh for failing to adopt ALL's own extremism. The league has taken fire from other antichoice groups and—despite oft-professed devotion to the Vatican—from church leaders.

In 2004, a spokeswoman for Washington, DC, archbishop Cardinal Theodore McCarrick sought to distance him from an ALL campaign for denial of communion to prochoice politicians. She told the *Washington Post* McCarrick had been “very clear” that “our teaching” allows Catholics to decide whether to receive communion.¹ Douglas Johnson, legislative director of the firmly antichoice National Right to Life Committee,

said of ALL in 2003, “I think they're more interested in making a statement than making a difference.”²

League president Judie Brown has referred to her supporters, such as they are, as “hardliners”³

who constitute “the real prolife movement.”⁴ In 1999, the Institute for Democracy Studies said ALL sat atop the “extremist wing of the antichoice movement.”⁵

“We are laying the groundwork for a Christian movement that will dictate to politicians what it means to be prolife,” Brown once said.⁶ Despite such grand goals, the league can

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Key Findings

- The American Life League’s unusually extreme antichoice positions have led it to criticize, from the right, even reliable far-right conservatives and have sparked rejection of the league by Catholic church officials and other antichoice groups.
- In particular, ALL parts with many antichoice groups over contraception, which ALL categorically rejects and would like to see banned by law.
- ALL has failed to deliver on numerous plans and projects, including a campaign to raise money from baseball personalities to build a “campus for life” and a planned anticondom advertising campaign in Washington media and public spaces.
- ALL’s business dealings with a direct-mail firm in which ALL founder Paul Brown holds the controlling interest have been called “a scandal” by one ex-employee and have been described as unusual by experts.
- An independent watchdog rates ALL’s financial capacity and efficiency as poor.
- ALL engages in many overtly political activities, some of which would appear to violate at least the spirit of its charity tax status.
- ALL has had close ties with such antichoice figures as Father Paul Marx, Joseph Scheidler, Bryan Kemper and former congressman Robert Dornan, who once called his political opponents “lesbian spear-chuckers.”
- In a typically misogynistic comment, Paul Brown once said a rape victim was “not the most beautiful woman,” adding, “When I hear her say she was raped, my response is, ‘You wish.’”

point to few effects on politicians’ or Catholic leaders’ decisions, and it often appears unable to implement its own plans. A heavily publicized 2003 drive to build a “campus for life” was abandoned; a 2002 anticondom advertising campaign was produced but never made it into newspapers and subway stations as planned.

In addition to ALL’s inability to deliver on promises, questions have been raised about its finances, and about the propriety of its business dealings—in particular, large contracts with an ALL founder’s private company, a stone’s throw from ALL’s Stafford, Virginia, headquarters.

The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* in 1999 detailed millions of dollars in ALL contracts with the direct mail firm Anthony, Kane and Associates, in which ALL founder Paul Brown holds the controlling interest. Experts deemed the transactions legal but unusual, and the *Times-Dispatch* quoted former ALL publications manager Stephen Dunham as complaining, “So much money is being squandered.” Tax records show the transactions continued at least until 2003, when the league reported doing \$1.42 million in business with Anthony, Kane and Associates.

The independent watchdog Charity Navigator, which assesses nonprofits’ efficiency and capacity, gives ALL one star on a four-star scale. The league operates as a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit, annually reporting revenue of more than \$6 million, nearly all of it listed under direct public support.⁷ It collects no membership dues, claims a board of five members, and in 2004 paid over \$70,000 each to two board members, four employees and an outside lawyer. The league holds special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council,⁸ and claims ties to a network of small antichoice groups across the United States. Many of the groups appear tiny, dormant or defunct.

Although the group publicly renounces violence, the statements of its officials

can be inflammatory. National Director David Bereit of STOPP International, an ALL division, delivered a speech months after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States in which he used gunshot sounds to punctuate his description of an abortion “killing spree,” likening abortions to shootings and equating practitioners with terrorists.⁹

“Many prolife organizations act as though abortion was nothing more than a political question,” Judie Brown writes disapprovingly on the ALL Web site. “We don’t buy it. We know that ours is a moral crusade.”¹⁰

II HISTORY

Judie and Paul Brown founded the then-American Life Lobby in 1979 after breaking with the National Right to Life Committee, which they deemed too moderate. Judie Brown said in 1981 that the committee had been “trying to destroy my husband” by absorbing his Life Amendment Political Action Committee.¹¹

According to the Institute for Democracy Studies, the Browns started ALL with financial support from *Conservative Digest* founder Richard Viguerie, who in later years worked to muster support for a Salvadoran death-squad leader and led the pro-Oliver North, Reverend Sun Myung Moon-backed American Freedom Coalition.¹²

ALL says that in 1981 it helped Father Paul Marx found Human Life International.¹³ The following year, Judie Brown testified in the US Congress in opposition to the Public Health Service Act’s Title X, which seeks to ensure provision of reproductive-health services to poor women. Signing the bill in 1970, President Richard Nixon had said, “No American woman should be denied access to family-planning assistance because of her economic condition.”¹⁴

The 1990s saw ALL maintain a political and judicial focus. Its 1994 challenge to the Freedom of Access to

Clinic Entrances Act failed when, the following year, the Supreme Court refused to hear the case. During the 1996 presidential campaign, after even far-right Republicans Ralph Reed and William Bennett questioned a plank in the Republican party platform calling for a constitutional abortion ban, ALL doggedly agitated in favor of the plank.¹⁵

At the end of the decade, ALL sought to expand, annexing a few smaller groups. Some remain within ALL, while others left the league; one of the latter was Rachel’s Vineyard, which runs controversial “retreats” for women who have had abortions.¹⁶

In January 2002, ALL’s stridency and inaccuracy led to the failure of a planned advertising campaign. The league produced ads to counter a Condoms4Life campaign promoting condom use for HIV prevention.¹⁷ ALL vowed to place its ads “in the Washington, D.C., Metro, the *Washington Times*, and other national papers.”¹⁸ Catholics for a Free Choice called attention to inaccuracies in the ALL campaign and to unauthorized use of a photograph of CFFC president Frances Kissling.¹⁹ The conservative *Washington Times* refused to publish the ALL ad, leaving Judie Brown to rage at the newspaper and at CFFC in a press release.²⁰ Not only did the *Times* not run the ALL countercampaign, but there is also no evidence the ALL advertisements appeared at Metro stations or in any publication at all. ALL continues nonetheless to claim on its Web site that it “responded with ads of its own” to the CFFC ads.²¹

The following year, ALL conducted a “Battin’ 1000” campaign, intended to harness baseball personalities’ money to build a “campus for life.”²² Once again, the group proved unable to bring its plans to fruition. The campus never materialized.

Also in 2003, ALL started the “Deadly Dozen” campaign, in which it sought—often unsuccessfully, even in diocesan newspapers—to publish advertisements denouncing prominent prochoice

TIMELINE

- 1967** Judie, Paul Brown married.
- 1979** Browns found ALL after breaking with National Right to Life Committee.
- 1980** Paul Brown, lawyer Sassone mount unsuccessful bid to force bishops to allow political activity on church grounds.
- 1981** Paul Marx founds Human Life International, with ALL claiming a role.
- 1982** Judie Brown testifies in opposition to Title X, law providing health care for poor women.
- 1987** ALL relationship with Congressman Robert Dornan (R-CA) begins, according to ALL.
- 1994** ALL launches unsuccessful challenge to law ensuring free entry to reproductive health clinics.
- 1996** Judie Brown backs presidential candidate of US Taxpayers Party, which advocates creating paramilitary groups in US.
- 1999** *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reports ex-ALL employee’s criticism of ALL business dealings with Paul Brown’s company; “scandal” involves at least \$18 million by 2004.
- 2000** UN Economic and Social Council grants ALL special observer status.
- 2001** ALL’s STOPP International criticizes Planned Parenthood for offering free services to New Yorkers after 9/11 attack.
- 2002** ALL produces inaccurate anticondom ad campaign, finds no one willing to publish the ads.
- 2003** ALL raises baseball money to build “campus for life,” which has not materialized.
ALL unsatisfied with passage of “partial-birth” abortion ban. National Right to Life Committee director Johnson on ALL: “I think they’re more interested in making a statement that making a difference.”
ALL starts “Deadly Dozen” campaign seeking to demonize prochoice Catholic politicians.
- 2004** Judie Brown challenges pope over bishops’ willingness to allow prochoice politicians to take communion, admonishes bishops to “pray about whether it’s time to step aside”; Washington archbishop rejects ALL’s position.
ALL’s Crusade skirts violation of charity status, publishing list of “proabortion” politicians next to instruction to vote against such politicians. ALL: “Having a conscience, by itself, means nothing in particular.”
Charity Navigator gives ALL one of possible four stars for financial efficiency, capacity.
- 2005** ALL taps Dornan to promote Right to Life Act.
ALL board member Schepens warns of a coming European “civil war” over Muslim immigration.
- 2006** Judie Brown calls President George W. Bush a “wimp” for his refusal to support the South Dakota move to challenge *Roe v. Wade*.

Catholic politicians. The advertisements were criticized over their resemblance to a 1995 poster campaign of the same name that followed several shootings of abortion providers and which publicized doctors' names and addresses.²³

In 2005, former US congressman Robert Dornan began working for ALL to promote the Right to Life Act in Congress.

III INDIVIDUALS

Judie Brown, *president*

Brown, a Los Angeles native, became involved in the antichoice movement in the late 1960s.²⁴ She and husband Paul Brown met while both worked for Kmart, were married in 1967 and founded ALL in 1979. Judie Brown is a stridently orthodox Catholic whose conservatism at times appears to surpass even that of senior church officials. In 2004, for example, she challenged Pope John Paul II to account for two cardinals' view that communion could rightly be distributed to prochoice politicians.²⁵

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ALL's Web site indicates she has attended El Camino Junior College, the University of California Los Angeles and the "New York Management School."^{26,27} Brown is a lady of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, a Vatican-tied group that speaks approvingly of the Crusades and condescendingly of "some chivalric orders whose membership is open to non-Catholics,"²⁸ and a member of the Cardinal Newman Society, which harasses students and academics whom it considers insufficiently conservative on Catholic campuses. Brown is one of about 80 correspondents of the Vatican's

Pontifical Academy for Life,²⁹ a seemingly honorary position for those who "work in institutes and centers of study on the culture of life."³⁰ A search of the academy's extensive Web site finds Brown mentioned only once, on the list of correspondents; her only concrete academy-related activity, an online news search suggests, has been distributing academy statements in the US. Nevertheless, as Pope John Paul II named her twice to the academy, it appears that the Vatican leadership holds her in some regard.

Judie Brown is the voice of ALL and, frequently, of the Crusade for the Defense of Our Catholic Church, an in-house ALL affiliate. She admits little complexity in the abortion debate or related matters. Calling in 2004 for refusal of communion to prochoice politicians, for example, she said, "There is no debate. There is no alternative. The truth does not change, regardless of politics."³¹

Paul Brown, *executive vice president and chief operating officer*

Paul Brown holds the controlling interest in the direct mail company Anthony, Kane and Associates, with which ALL has transacted at least \$18 million in business since 1991.

He and Judie Brown met at Kmart when she instructed him to punch a time card and he—as paraphrased in a 1981 article—replied that she should "go to hell." The same article characterizes him as a man who "boasts of being a male chauvinist" and whose "decidedly pro-male-chauvinism" wife "brushes his hair, shines his shoes and fetches his coffee." Paul Brown's undiplomatic tendencies may in part explain why—despite the couple's professed support of "male chauvinism"—she, and not he, is president of ALL. He once said a woman who had been raped was "not the most beautiful creature in the world, so when I hear her say she was raped, my response is, 'You wish.'"³²

Robert Dornan, congressional representative

Former US congressman Robert Dornan joined ALL in 2005 to aid the league’s Capitol Hill efforts and in particular its support of a Right to Life Act.³³ ALL says its relationship with Dornan began in 1987,³⁴ and ALL solicitation letters from the period bear the congressman’s signature. In 1996, he clashed with his party’s leadership when he sought in a Defense Department authorization bill to ban gays and people with HIV from the services and to end pornography sales on bases.³⁵ Dornan failed to win the Republican presidential nomination in 1996 and has lost several House races since then. Nicknamed “B-1 Bob” for his support of military spending, Dornan once referred to opponents as “lesbian spear-chuckers.”³⁶

Philippe Schepens, board member

Dr. Schepens is an ordinary of the Pontifical Academy for Life³⁷ and is secretary general of the World Federation of Doctors Who Respect Human Life. The Belgian has compared abortion with Nazism and often rails against the degraded state of the modern world.

The doctor appears to harbor vivid fears about Europe’s Muslim population. In a December 2005 post to another writer’s blog, Schepens wrote that “many Muslims” in Belgium “consider our tolerance as weakness and hope to increase their number so that they get finally the majority here.” Continued Schepens, “I fear that, due to the lack of presence of their own educated people, they will create new ... leaders who will be much more radical Islamists than the [ones] they had at home. ... A later emergence of major troubles, including a civil war, is not unthinkable in Western Europe’s future.”³⁸

Robert Sassone, board member

Sassone is an attorney who in the 1980s defended Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry and others arrested in abortion-clinic protests. In

1980, Sassone worked with Paul Brown on a challenge to US Catholic bishops’ refusal to allow antichoice political activities on church grounds. ALL touts Sassone’s help in obtaining UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) special observer status for the league in 2000.³⁹ Sassone’s wife, Susan Sassone, was a member of ALL’s original three-member board and in 1985 spearheaded an antichoice-referendum drive in California. He is a former official of Human Life International and of the defunct World Life League.

Paul Marx, former board member

Father Marx, a major antichoice figure who is widely seen as anti-Semitic, in 1981 founded Human Life International, which lists ALL president Judie Brown as an adviser.⁴⁰ A 1999 *Catholic World Report* article described “chronic rejection” of HLI “by members of America’s Catholic hierarchy.”⁴¹ In an early example typical of later statements, Marx wrote in 1977,

Nicknamed “B-1 Bob” for his support of military spending, Dornan once referred to opponents as “lesbian spear-chuckers.”

“It is a strange thing how many leaders in the abortion movement are Jewish.”⁴² In 1980, St. John’s University in Minnesota cited “extreme” views in dismissing Marx from its Human Life Center, which he had founded. His anti-Semitic writings also appear to have led St. Paul, Minnesota, archbishop Harry Flynn in 1997 to back out of a planned concelebration of Mass.⁴³

HLI in 1994 saw its nonprofit status revoked in Canada after the government ruled it was engaging in political activities. Marx’s organization also failed repeatedly during the 1990s to gain NGO accreditation at the United Nations, with the world body at one point rejecting HLI’s bid because of “attacks on Islam,” a stance “against the purposes of the United Nations,”

“aggressive language” and the “issue of tolerance.” In one oft-reported scandalous statement, antichoice activist Don Treshman—who would later become HLI’s spokesman—called a 1994 sniper attack on a doctor a “superb tactic.”⁴⁴

Marx gave up his post as head of HLI in 1999. It has been reported that his resignation was not voluntary and that other HLI leaders had come to view his extraordinary extremism as a liability. In addition, a board member’s letter to colleagues late in 1999 cited “accounting, legal, and organizational problems” at HLI under Marx.

Joseph Scheidler, former board member

Pro-Life Action League founder Scheidler was an early advocate of various abortion-clinic disruptions. A promoter of “sidewalk counseling,” Scheidler was the defendant in a nearly

harass them with phone calls and mailings and conduct investigations into their private lives.⁴⁶

Tom Monaghan, former legal affairs director

Monaghan is the founder of Domino’s Pizza and a former owner of baseball’s Detroit Tigers. A renowned right-wing Catholic, Monaghan in 2005 began to publicize his \$250 million plan to create a Florida town in which no one could sell contraception or pornography and Monaghan would control cable television.⁴⁷ In 2003, he supported ALL’s campaign for funds from baseball figures to build a “campus for life” in Virginia.⁴⁸ Monaghan has spent large sums of money founding ultraorthodox Catholic schools. Speaking of traditional Catholic schools, Monaghan told the *Wall Street Journal*, “Maybe it’s cockiness, but I think I can do it better.”⁴⁹

Bryan Kemper, Rock for Life founder

Operation Rescue veteran Kemper founded the youth-focused antichoice group Rock for Life, which joined ALL in the late 1990s. He left Rock for Life in 2003 and is now president of the “Christ-centered youth prolife organization” Stand True Ministries, in Fredericksburg, Virginia.⁵⁰ Rock for Life activities include obscure concerts, denunciations of mainstream entertainment and distribution of pamphlets outside schools.⁵¹

In December 1994, Kemper and other Operation Rescue members confronted an abortion practitioner at his home so aggressively that an FBI probe ensued and a court settlement ultimately required the antichoice activists to stay 45 feet away from the doctor’s home and refrain from rifling through his garbage. The protesters had surrounded the doctor as he was leaving his San Bernardino County, California, home, resulting in an altercation in which the doctor said he was pushed and left with bruises.⁵²

“If abortion were made illegal tomorrow,” Kemper said in 1999, “our work would be far from done.”⁵³ He sells

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two-decade-long National Organization for Women lawsuit over attempts to obstruct clinics.

In his 1985 book *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion*, Scheidler says “violence on our part would be counterproductive” but expresses skepticism about clinics’ allegations of protester violence and appears to equate resistance to aggressive protesters with the protesters’ own crimes. Scheidler complains in the book that an antichoice protester in New York “was jostled after he entered a New York abortion clinic, spilled gasoline on the property and set the clinic ablaze.” “The only one who suffered injury,” writes Scheidler of the arsonist, “was the antiabortionist.”⁴⁵ Scheidler also recommends in the book that antichoice activists “adopt” abortion practitioners—

his aggressive stance with an elaborate tale of personal triumph over dire childhood circumstances. He said in 1997, “I was born out of wedlock, I was very sick as an infant, I had spinal meningitis, they said I had severe brain damage, they put me in the Special Olympics as a kid, they said I was retarded [and] they always told me I was worthless, I was dumb. By the time I was 13, I was already doing drugs. ... I went through hell as a child, but I am happy that I was not aborted.”⁵⁴

James Sedlak, *STOPP International founder and executive director*

Sedlak leads STOPP International, which is ALL’s campaign to “shut down” Planned Parenthood. He provides news commentary for the USA Radio Network, headed by Christian Right radio personality Marlin Maddoux, and contributes material to HLI reports. In 2006, Sedlak said a South Dakota abortion ban was imperfect because it did not also ban contraception.⁵⁵

David Bereit, *STOPP national director*

STOPP International’s national head since 2005, Bereit led a late-1990s campaign that helped make Bryan, Texas, “the most antichoice place in the nation,” in the words of former Planned Parenthood president Gloria Feldt.⁵⁶ The former pharmaceutical salesman’s Coalition for Life, however, failed to force Planned Parenthood out of Bryan.⁵⁷

On a Web site Bereit maintains to promote his availability as a motivational speaker for conservative groups, he has posted a videotaped speech in which he uses taped gunshot sounds to punctuate his description of an abortion “killing spree,” likening abortions to shootings and—just months after September 11, 2001—equating practitioners with terrorists. In the same speech, Bereit refers to abortion clinics as “strategic locations” and to facilities where abortion practitioners are trained as “training camps.” Although Bereit never advocates violence, it is hard to ignore the

inflammatory implications of his analogies: If his “killing spree” description was widely used, he said in the 2001 speech, “People would be recruited. People would be mobilized ... to make sure that everything that was possible was done to make sure this didn’t happen again.”⁵⁸

James Berlucchi, *former Battin’ 1000 president*

Gospel musician and business consultant Berlucchi was paid \$114,000 by ALL in 2003 to serve as president of the league’s campaign to harness baseball money for construction of a

An independent charity watchdog recently rated ALL as poor for efficiency and worse for capacity.

“campus for life.”⁵⁹ The campus never materialized, and the project appears to have been abandoned. Berlucchi has served as head of Legatus, Tom Monaghan’s exclusive Catholic executives’ group.⁶⁰ He has been called “the first Catholic to play a high-profile role in several Promise Keepers rallies.”⁶¹

IV FINANCES

An independent charity watchdog recently rated ALL as poor for efficiency and worse for capacity. ALL spends millions of dollars on publications and mailings, with a substantial portion of business going to ALL chief operating officer Paul Brown’s direct mail firm. Former ALL employee Stephen Dunham has accused the Browns of enriching themselves through this arrangement, at the expense of the group’s mission.

In 2004, the watchdog Charity Navigator awarded ALL one star on a four-star scale for overall financial health. That overall assessment reflected a rating for capacity of one star—with a score of only 7.35 of 30—and a two-star rating for efficiency.⁶² Tax filings provide some of

the numbers behind the unenthusiastic report and show that ALL continued to spend millions of dollars at Paul Brown's company.

ALL in 2004 reported nearly \$7 million in revenue and spent just over \$5 million on program activities, over \$800,000 in management costs and almost \$900,000 on fundraising. The league named "dissemination of educational materials" as its largest accomplishment, having spent more than \$4 million for the purpose. Reported expenses included at least \$3 million, listed under various categories, in publication- and mailing-related activities.

In 2004, ALL reported paying at least \$61,000 each to four of its five board members, with Judie Brown topping the list at more than \$100,000. Direct mail manager Margaret Guellich was paid \$113,000, and ALL reported eight other employees as making at least \$50,000 each. Lawyer Marion Harrison, the only independent contractor ALL reported, was paid nearly \$80,000.

Former ALL publications manager Dunham had "complained to the IRS and elsewhere that the Browns [had] allegedly been personally enriching themselves through the league's transactions with Mr. Brown and his business interests." Dunham called the arrangement "a scandal."

ALL reported spending \$1.25 million on "direct mail"—writing that term in, since is not included as such in the standard categories of functional expenses. Of that amount, the league listed \$970,000 as program services and only \$280,000 as fundraising, the usual purpose of direct mail.

The league's direct mail business appears to go almost entirely to Paul Brown's Anthony, Kane and Associates. In 2003, ALL paid \$1.4 million to the firm, in which Paul Brown holds the controlling interest. It was the lowest such figure since at least 2001. ALL's

total payments to the firm from 1991 to 2004 were at least \$18 million.⁶³

A 1999 *Richmond Times-Dispatch* article raised questions about ALL's dealings with Anthony, Kane. In yearly increments of between \$1.1 million and \$2.5 million, the *Times-Dispatch* reported, ALL had conducted at least \$12.5 million in business with Anthony, Kane between 1991 and 1997. Paul Brown told the newspaper that ALL jobs constituted about 20 percent of Anthony, Kane business and that he made no ALL decisions that benefited his company. Judie Brown said she abstained from ALL board votes on Anthony, Kane business and that ALL took comparative bids to avoid overpaying the firm. Experts said the ALL-Anthony, Kane dealings appeared unusual but not illegal.⁶⁴

The newspaper also reported that former ALL publications manager Dunham had "complained to the IRS and elsewhere that the Browns [had] allegedly been personally enriching themselves through the league's transactions with Mr. Brown and his business interests." Dunham called the arrangement "a scandal." "So much money is being squandered," Dunham said. Paul Brown called the former employee "bitter."⁶⁵

Anthony, Kane caters, predominantly and perhaps exclusively, to Catholic groups. These include Catholic Relief Services, the Legionaries of Christ and the Sacred Hearts Missions.⁶⁶

ALL's lobbying and political expenditures are strictly limited by law. 501 (c) (3) charitable organizations such as ALL may not engage in direct support for candidates or campaigns. ALL vows in its articles of incorporation that "no substantial part of [its] activities ... shall be the carrying on of propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation." Some of the group's activities appear to violate at least the spirit of those commitments.

A link on the Web site of ALL's Crusade for the Defense of Our Catholic

Church leads to a list of “proabortion Catholics in Congress.” An adjacent link goes to a “Statement on Political Action”⁶⁷ instructing readers to base votes “first” on the “non-negotiable ... life issues.”⁶⁸ The links are a clear appeal for votes against “proabortion” lawmakers.

ALL has in recent years pushed for the confirmation of Supreme Court justices John Roberts and Samuel Alito and condemned prochoice Catholic legislators in a recurring “Deadly Dozen” campaign. In 2005, ALL announced that former US representative Robert Dornan was “joining American Life League’s efforts to protect and defend the lives of preborn children,” firstly by “refocusing attention on the Right to Life Act introduced by Duncan Hunter (R-Calif).”⁶⁹ ALL reported no lobbying expenses in 2004 or 2003, after reporting \$83,000 in 2002, \$107,000 in 2001 and \$147,000 in 2000.

ALL’s net assets as of 2004 were \$2.14 million.⁷⁰ County figures show its Virginia headquarters covers 1.2 acres and, when last assessed, had a taxable value of \$949,000.⁷¹ ALL receives no government grants and reports no membership fees.

V ISSUES

ALL aggressively promotes extreme positions on what it calls “life issues”—abortion, euthanasia, stem-cell research and cloning—and on contraception and a wide range of religious, social and cultural matters.

The league believes **abortion** is murder and that a legal person is created at fertilization. It seeks an abortion ban without any exception, even if a woman’s life is threatened. “Once fertilization has taken place, there is no more ‘egg.’ A new tiny person has been formed,” ALL says.⁷² To defend such positions, ALL often employs a strange mix of scientific language, Catholic teaching and suspect logic. In 2000, Judie Brown said the league was “aware of no

scientific evidence that proves that a human being does not exist at fertilization.”⁷³

So intensely does ALL oppose all **contraception** that in 2000, when the Food and Drug Administration indicated it could allow birth-control-pill sales over the counter, Judie Brown called it “the most dangerous announcement a US government agency has made in recent memory.”⁷⁴ “Study after study shows that birth-control use always leads to more abortion,” she wrote in a June 2005 commentary.⁷⁵ Although Brown did not make reference to specific figures, ALL appears at times to count contraception use as abortion. ALL espouses the discredited view that emergency contraception is not contraception but abortion. In 2006, amid growing controversy over new antiabortion pushes in various US states, STOPP International executive director James Sedlak called a South Dakota abortion ban inadequate because it did not also ban contraception.⁷⁶

As part of a campaign to “educate Bill Gates” about “**population** elimination” practices by Gates-backed charities, Judie Brown in 1999 called for a massive drive to increase world population. “Children all over the world need to know that they should have large families. It is the only hope for the future of the world,” she said.⁷⁷ (The following year, ALL claimed that its prayer campaign targeting Gates was behind the court-ordered breakup of Microsoft.⁷⁸) Such an extreme pronatalist position places Brown at the fringe of the antichoice movement and raises questions about her views on pregnancy and its relation to women’s role in society.

Judie Brown displayed a rigid concept of **sex and gender** when quoted in a 2006 article about a teacher who had had a sex change: “The sex of the human being is determined ... when that human being is but a single cell.”⁹² Brown also has claimed Planned Parenthood creates young people’s sex drives. “Teens are not biologically programmed to have sex as

much as they're indoctrinated to do so," she wrote in 2006.

ALL has referred to "antifertility vaccines, the next step in the attack on human procreation"⁷⁹ and called human embryonic stem-cell research "always immoral and unethical."⁸⁰

Such positions place ALL at the **right wing of the antichoice movement**, a distinction it embraces. The group has criticized, as too soft on abortion or other subjects, the George W. Bush administration,⁸¹ the near-totality of the US Congress,⁸² the National Right to Life Council,⁸³ Wal-Mart,⁸⁴ the Christian Coalition,⁸⁵ Catholic universities,⁸⁶ Rush Limbaugh and the Walt Disney Co.⁸⁷ In 2004, it called on Pope John Paul II to explain why cardinals Joseph Ratzinger—later Pope Benedict XVI—and Theodore McCarrick had said communion could be given to prochoice politicians. US bishops, Judie Brown wrote in 2004, are loath to criticize Catholic Democrats' prochoice views, because the bishops "are the grandsons of immigrants who always voted Democrat."⁸⁸

The league believes Catholics should work to enshrine Vatican positions in US law, and it harangues US bishops whose interpretations of Rome's policies differ from ALL's.

When the Senate in March 2003 passed a bill to ban "partial-birth" abortion, ALL voiced only grudging satisfaction. Judie Brown said that with the "partial-birth" campaign over, "our elected officials can focus on solving the real problem: legalized abortion in any form. ... The debate over partial-birth abortion has sidetracked the primary goals of the prolife movement."⁸⁹ Even overturning *Roe v. Wade*, ALL said in 2004, is an insufficient goal, because it would not "guarantee" a nationwide abortion ban. The league said "decay from within"—the unwillingness of antichoice groups to hold positions as categorical as those of ALL—"could spell the end of what we have known as the prolife movement."⁹⁰

Ostensible allies have slammed ALL's extremism. "Valuable and practical prolife legislation never seems to measure up to their standard," said National Right to Life Committee legislative director Douglas Johnson. "I think they're more interested in making a statement than making a difference."⁹¹

ALL professes strict loyalty to **Vatican teachings** and rejects any Catholic debate on its issues. ALL's positions are indistinguishable from those of its Crusade. The league believes Catholics should work to enshrine Vatican positions in US law, and it harangues US bishops whose interpretations of Rome's policies differ from ALL's. Since the hierarchy teaches that abortion is wrong, ALL said in 2003, US law should forbid the practice, and prochoice Catholics are simply "wrong."⁹³

The league appears at times to see itself as outranking even church officials, particularly as pertains to the distribution of communion. Commenting in April 2004 in support of ALL's position that papal pronouncements supported withholding the sacrament, Judie Brown said, "The pope has spoken. What's the holdup?" Bishops who do not deny communion to prochoice politicians, she wrote, "need to pray about whether it's time to step aside."⁹⁴ An ALL advertising campaign the following month slammed Washington archbishop Cardinal Theodore McCarrick for saying he was not "comfortable" refusing communion to public figures: The advertisement depicted Jesus on the cross and asked, "Cardinal McCarrick: Are you comfortable now?"⁹⁵

Church leaders that campaign year sought distance from ALL. In comments that incurred ALL's wrath, McCarrick said, "I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to ask my priests to do it. ... We should have no confrontation at the altar."⁹⁶ McCarrick spokeswoman Susan Gibbs added, in response to the ALL advertisements, that the cardinal was "very comfortably in communion with the church on this issue."

A 2003 episode illustrates the league’s precarious position with respect to church officials. In a direct mail campaign, the league attacked the conservative *National Catholic Register* after the newspaper, citing Vatican guidelines, refused a “Deadly Dozen” advertisement. The paper still expressed support for the campaign and offered to run it with minor changes; ALL nonetheless accused the paper of having “more respect for the political power of fraudulent Catholics” than for “the spiritual power of Holy Mother Church and the Vicar of Christ, Pope John Paul II!” In an exchange of letters published in the *Register*, publisher Father Owen Kearns sought reconciliation but still called ALL’s mailing “injurious and extremely unprofessional.” The mailing, he added, “puts American Life League in the ridiculous position of equating an ad with the magisterium of the church.”

ALL’s guide for the 2004 US elections instructed voters not to vote for any candidate who supported any legal abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem-cell research or human cloning.⁹⁷ The league did not address what voters should do if no candidates in a race categorically opposed all four practices, but Judie Brown wrote that George W. Bush appeared “more prolife” than John Kerry and that voters should pray for “prudence to do what can be done, given the moral vacuum created for the politicians by a lack of resolve on the part of far too many in the prolife movement.”⁹⁸ The guide stressed obedience: “Having a conscience, by itself, means nothing in particular,” ALL wrote.⁹⁹

In 1996, Judie Brown backed US Taxpayers Party presidential candidate Howard Phillips, an antichoice extremist. The Taxpayers platform called for paramilitary militias in the United States.¹⁰⁰ Judie Brown said in a *Wanderer* article, “Sometimes, when we have only two candidates in the field, we have no choice but to vote for the ‘lesser of two evils.’ That is not the case in 1996.”¹⁰¹

ALL sees its antichoice work as part of

a **culture war** and has often criticized mainstream institutions’ morality. The league in 1995 condemned Walt Disney Co. for animated movies “filled with sexual imagery”—for example, a dust cloud in *The Lion King* that purportedly spelled out “sex.”¹⁰² Animators have been known to hide ribald references in their work, but even the *Catholic News Service’s* film reviewer, Henry Herx, said, “I don’t think this has national importance.”¹⁰³

The Web site of ALL affiliate Rock for Life provides a cautionary list of “proabortion bands” and “other entertainers” of concern, whose productions young people should presumably avoid. Some earned their place on the list by simple attendance at a march. A few are antichoice figures who hold less extreme positions than those of ALL. The list includes the Catholic ultraconservative Mel Gibson, director of “The Passion of the Christ”; prochoice figures with broad mainstream appeal, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Springsteen, are also named.¹⁰⁴

VI AFFILIATES

ALL promotes three main in-house divisions: the youth-centered Rock for Life, the anti-Planned Parenthood campaign STOPP International and the Crusade for the Defense of Our Catholic Church.

Rock for Life, headed by Erik Whittington, is an antichoice counterpoint to the mainstream Rock for Choice. Founded by Operation Rescue veteran Bryan Kemper, Rock for Life stages abortion-clinic protests, distributes pamphlets outside high schools, produces concerts and recordings, runs informational booths at cultural events and warns against supporting prochoice entertainers.¹⁰⁵ Rock for Life claims support mainly from pointedly “Christian” entertainers.¹⁰⁶ By contrast, Rock for Choice was founded by the influential punk group L7, and its concerts have featured Pearl Jam, Rage

Against the Machine, Nirvana and other superstars.¹⁰⁷

STOPP International, led by James Sedlak and David Bereit, seeks to end funding for Planned Parenthood. “We intend to cause such discontent with Planned Parenthood programs that it will have no choice but to close its doors and get out of town!” the group says on its Web site.¹⁰⁸ Each year, STOPP posts a “survey” of Planned Parenthood facilities around the United States that includes wild allegations—for example, that Planned Parenthood of America promotes promiscuity and pornography and covers up for rapists and sex abusers.¹⁰⁹

STOPP in 2006 launched stopplannedparenthoodtaxfunding.com, a brief online screed and petition asking “all elected officials to ensure that Planned Parenthood receives absolutely

ALL is chronically unable to make common cause with natural allies in the Catholic hierarchy and in the conservative and antichoice movements.

no taxpayer dollars.” The site screams, “ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!” and says Planned Parenthood’s “top goal ... is to push its agenda of promiscuous sex everywhere in our society.”¹¹⁰ In 2001, STOPP criticized Planned Parenthood for offering free services in New York after the World Trade Center attack.¹¹¹

STOPP views US society as degraded and advocates conservative Christian belief as a basis for public policy. In 2005, it said the 1965 *Griswold v. Connecticut* decision “set the stage for the growth of moral relativism and hedonism in this once-great Christian nation.”¹¹²

The **Crusade for the Defense of Our Catholic Church**, headed by Joseph Starrs, promotes Catholic orthodoxy and antichoice advocacy. Its Web site contains a prominently featured list of “proabortion Catholics in congress,”¹¹³ and it calls on voters to make opposition to abortion their first political priority.¹¹⁴

The group has condemned late US president John F. Kennedy for his vow to “keep his Catholic faith out of his public service.” A list of abortion statistics was included in one such advertisement, with “JFK” printed in bold beside each. According to Crusade, “The ultimate political goal for Catholics must be the achievement of public policies and laws that result in the legal protection of all innocent human life.”¹¹⁵

Celebrate Life is ALL’s antichoice magazine, “America’s favorite family-friendly, prolife periodical.”¹¹⁶ ALL claims to send the magazine to “over 70,000 prolife homes”¹¹⁷—a figure that, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, would exceed the average circulation of the *New Republic*¹¹⁸ or the *Christian Science Monitor*.¹¹⁹

The league maintains a roster of more than 70 US associate groups. Web searches suggest many are inactive or exist in name only. The remainder include a Blount County, California, group that asks whether the September 2001 al-Qaeda attacks were a warning from God¹²⁰; Catholics Respect Life of Keller, Texas, which runs a “Youth for Life Boot Camp”¹²¹; and Expectant Mother Care, which New York state investigated for allegedly deceiving women into thinking it provided abortion services.¹²²

VII CONCLUSION

ALL is, as the saying goes, all hat and no cattle. It appears unable to deliver on many of its promises, carry out its plans or advance its agenda. This is hardly surprising, since the league’s positions are at the extreme right edge of the antichoice spectrum and far beyond what even most conservative Americans want.

ALL is chronically unable to make common cause with natural allies in the Catholic hierarchy and in the conservative and antichoice movements. Even under the antichoice George W. Bush administration, the league has kept

up a torrent of criticism of the US government, calling President Bush a "wimp" for failing to endorse a 2006 South Dakota bill that banned all abortion without exception.¹²³

The list of those criticized by ALL includes not only prochoice advocates but also virtually everyone else involved in the abortion debate in any capacity. So far to the right is Judie Brown's organization that it has found itself condemning such reactionary entities and people as the Christian Coalition, Rush Limbaugh and the National Right to Life Committee, not to mention senior officials in the church whose teachings ALL claims strictly to practice. Conservative targets of ALL criticism have regularly fired back, scorning the league as marginal and out of touch.

ALL's finances have consistently been rated as poor, a reality that undoubtedly also hampers the group's effectiveness,

especially when one considers the questions that have been raised about the propriety of its business dealings.

ALL's goals are ambitious—the movement ALL envisions will "dictate to politicians," Judie Brown has said—but rarely if ever reached. Planned construction projects are never built; advertising campaigns are produced but never placed. Extraordinary extremism usually appears to be a major factor in the failures.

The league's likelihood of success is tiny. ALL's poor and shady finances, its long record of impotency and its inability to gather and keep allies mean that it poses no serious challenge to choice. The Browns will no doubt continue their "moral crusade" indefinitely, but on the political and religious fronts, they seem not to have what it takes to make things happen.

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CATHOLICS FOR A FREE CHOICE

Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women's well-being and respect and affirm the moral capacity of women and men to make sound decisions about their lives. Through discourse, education and advocacy, CFFC works in the United States and internationally to infuse these values into public policy, community life, feminist analysis and Catholic social thinking and teaching.

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