

Trump, Northam, infanticide, blackface, and the fury of Democratic women

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If you watched Trump's State of the Union address Tuesday evening, your eye would have been drawn to the cadre of Democratic congresswomen all dressed in white as a kind of upscale, sedentary version of the Women's March, signifying their support of women and their #resistance to Donald Trump. All that was missing were the pussy hats. To me, it seemed kind of a sophomoric, ironically "Stepford Wife" form of political theatre. The irony of their lack of individuality deepened when I saw them hesitate to applaud Trump's line about making inroads in the battle against sex slavery, looking to each other for guidance (that's a good thing, right? But it's Trump who's doing it, so aaaaaaagh; they did applaud, thankfully). But they showed no hesitation whatsoever when Trump denounced the increasing callousness progressives show toward abortion. They hated that reference. While the Republicans rose in vigorous applause, they sat on their hands and radiated animosity in their stony faces and smouldering stares. Trump was referring to two recent developments in abortion law. One was the New York Reproductive Health Act, passed last week, which allows for abortion up to and including the process of delivery. Lawmakers and observers gave the passage of the Act a standing ovation. So it was not only the seriously extreme latitude the Act provides for women's control of their "reproductive" function that disturbed Trump; it was the celebratory response. `googletag.cmd.push(function() { googletag.display('div-gpt-ad-1549657078866-0'); });` The white-clad congresswomen were furious that he should harsh their mellow about what they perceive as yet another victory for women. But ordinary Americans do not find babies being killed in the birth canal something to celebrate. Only 13% of Americans support abortion into the third trimester, let alone in the birth canal (Only 28% support it into the second trimester). So chalk one up for Trump. Trump also referred to Virginia Governor Ralph Northam in his address. I feel very ambivalent about this guy. Northam is under fire and resisting calls for his resignation over a 1984 medical yearbook photo, allegedly of Northam wearing either a KKK hood or in blackface. Northam didn't admit to his presence in the photo, but conceded he had worn blackface to imitate Michael Jackson. He's asking for forgiveness. Opinion is divided on whether there can ever be redemption for any tasteless action in one's pre-political life (if the issue is racism). But Northam does not hold racist views. He did a dumb thing 35 years ago. The mobbing he is enduring is undeserved, and I am in favour of Northam retaining his position, and stonewalling until the self-righteous racism Furies move on to another target. But Trump did not mention Northam because of the yearbook brouhaha. Northam's other headache springs from comments he made about proposed bill HB 2491 introduced by Democratic congresswoman Kathy Tran, which would eliminate certain requirements around abortion: for example, the requirement that an ultrasound be performed prior to receiving consent; the requirement that two other physicians certify the need for a third trimester abortion attesting that the abortion is necessary for the physical or mental health of the mother; and the requirement that any such impairment should be substantial and irremediable.

`googletag.cmd.push(function() { googletag.display('div-gpt-ad-1549651502858-0'); });` Northam—who is, by the way, a pediatric neurologist—was a little too candid in his explanations about what the bill (which was defeated) actually meant. When an interviewer asked him what would happen to a baby born alive in the third trimester—that is, a full-term baby the mother could, according to the bill, decide to abort as she is delivering it—he explained that the baby would be born and "kept comfortable," and "then a discussion would ensue between the physicians and the mother." The logical translation: if the mother doesn't want the child to receive medical attention, then the doctors will help it to die. Northam has attempted to walk back the statement, but few objective observers are buying it. Northam's apparently calm acceptance of what should candidly be acknowledged, as "after-birth abortion" is more disturbing to me than his lousy judgment of what was funny 35 years ago. The discussion has gone far beyond a woman's right to control over her own body. We're not dealing any longer with a "viable fetus," which is what an unborn baby is called by ideologues who are determined to maintain the fiction that pregnant women are the only human beings in the room. When a baby is born, it is no longer a "fetus." The mother's body, to be precise, is no longer the issue. The baby's body is the issue. But Northam—and millions of feminists—are talking about the baby as if it were still a "fetus" rather than a fully born human being. Do progressive politicians not realize how creepy all of this is to ordinary people? Apparently not. I had an eerie sense of déjà vu when I heard Northam's remarks. Back in 2012, I wrote a column about two medical ethicists from Australian universities, Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva, who published an article in the prestigious *Journal of Medical Ethics*, "After-birth Abortion: Why should the baby live?" The question was rhetorical. They believed it shouldn't—and not just in the case of disability or grave deformity. They believed that the mother had a right to "after-birth abortion"—what most people call infanticide—for any unwanted baby at the time of birth. Maybe, the authors suggest, the mother's partner has left her; or Mom realizes it is going to be more expensive than she thought to raise the child. Whatever. They wrote: "When

circumstances occur after birth such that they would have justified abortion, what we call after-birth abortion should be permissible.” The question arises, why not give the baby up for adoption instead of killing it? No no, that wouldn’t do. The authors explain that if she kills the baby, then she knows the baby is gone forever, and she must “accept the irreversibility of the loss.” But knowing the baby is still alive “makes it difficult to accept the reality of the loss,” you see, and she “might suffer psychological distress.” And weighing the one against the other—live baby or mom’s distress—it’s a harder choice. The baby has to die. Perhaps some of the ladies in the white suits would agree? I think some of them would.