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Obama Says ‘Above My Pay Grade’ Comment Was Too Flip

Christopher Conkey reports on the presidential election.

Democratic presidential candidate **Barack Obama** said he had been too flip when answering a question about abortion at a religious forum last month.

Appearing on ABC-TV’s “This Week with **George Stephanopoulos**,” the Illinois senator was asked whether his response – “above my pay grade” — to the question of when a baby gains human rights was “too flip,” Obama told Stephanopoulos, “Probably. Yes. All I meant to communicate was that I don’t presume to be able to answer these kinds of theological questions.”

On NBC News’ “Meet the Press,” Obama’s running mate, **Joe Biden**, a Roman Catholic, said he is “prepared to accept the teachings of my church” that life begins “at the moment of conception.” But he stressed that “there are an awful lot of people of great confessional faiths...who have a different view.”

Many abortion opponents have seized on Obama’s “pay grade” comment at the Saddleback Church forum in California to draw distinctions with his Republican rival, Arizona Sen. **John McCain**. During the Republican convention, former Arkansas Gov. **Mike Huckabee** said: “It is not above John McCain’s pay grade to grasp the simple fact that life begins at conception, and he is committed to protecting it.”

McCain and his running mate, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, didn’t directly refer to abortion during their acceptance speeches last week, although McCain expressed his belief in the “culture of life” and the need to appoint conservative judges. At the religious forum where Obama made his “pay grade” remark, though McCain answered the same question concisely: “At the moment of



Barack Obama talks with pastor Rick Warren at Saddleback Church on August 16. (Getty Images)

conception.”

Democrats have repeatedly noted that McCain had considered abortion rights supporter Sen. **Joe Lieberman** to be his running mate before deciding on Palin, who, like McCain, opposes abortion. Their point is that abortion doesn't appear to be that high on Sen. McCain's priority list.

After voicing respect for abortion as a complex issue on Sunday, both Democratic candidates reiterated their policy goals: maintaining a woman's right to choose and reducing the number of abortions.

“What I do know is that abortion is a moral issue...and that in wrestling with those issues, I don't think that the government criminalizing the choices that families make is the best answer for reducing abortions,” Sen. Obama said on This Week. Sen. Biden said of his personal views against abortion: “For me to impose that judgment on everyone else who is equally and maybe more devout than I am...is inappropriate in a pluralistic society.”

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