

Evangelicals warn McCain on running mate choice

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WASHINGTON -- Conservative evangelical leaders have warned that Sen. John McCain risks losing the election if he chooses a running mate who supports abortion rights.

A panel of prominent anti-abortion advocates, including former presidential candidate Gov. Mike Huckabee, urged voters Aug. 15 to make an abortion and other "life issues" a priority this November.

"I believe that if Sen. McCain chooses a pro-abortion (running mate), he will give the election to Sen. Obama," said Bishop Harry Jackson, chairman of the Maryland-based High Impact Leadership Coalition. "It would be tantamount to political suicide."

Last week, McCain told *The Weekly Standard* that he would consider selecting a running mate, such as former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge or Sen. Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., who supports abortion rights.

Although Huckabee said that he would continue to support the Arizona senator regardless of the running mate, he acknowledged that unenthused evangelicals could potentially drive down voter turnout.

Tony Perkins, president of the conservative Family Research Council, warned that McCain must speak more openly about his pro-life views in order to inspire people of faith.

"It's not an issue of whether most evangelicals are going to vote for John McCain. It's an issue of intensity," Perkins said, adding, "I think the selection of an unabashed pro-life, pro-family candidate is going to be critical."

Lou Engle, founder of the evangelical group TheCall, called abortion "an historic injustice," and said he would consider staying home on Nov. 4 if McCain picks a running mate he considers unsatisfactory.

"We really have a voice of appeasement," Engle said. "There comes a time when we can't really just cooperate."

TheCall, a gathering of young evangelicals, was held Aug. 16 on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., to pray for an end to abortion and the "restoration" of marriage.

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