

Another fight about who's picking a fight

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So, who's playing politics with reauthorization of the [Violence Against Women Act?](#) [Sen. Schumer and the Democrats](#), or [Sen. Grassley and the Republicans](#)?

Well, probably both. Yes, Democrats would love to bolster the narrative that Republicans don't care about women, even though Grassley *et al.* object to new provisions added to the VAWA, not the existing law. And yes, by threatening the whole bill based on objections to small parts of it, some Senate Republicans (not all of them) reveal that while they may in general favor services for domestic violence victims, it's not exactly a top priority to them.

Of course both Senators Chuck are playing politics. That's their game, especially in leap years. The question isn't which side is trying to score political points; both sides are, almost all the time. But at their best they manage to do other things simultaneously--such as propose policy changes, some of them good ones.

Yet again and again, the media chatter focuses on talking points about who's respecting the agreed-upon status quo vs. who's playing politics. As if the status quo were always good and adequate, and as if politics was ever apolitical. Why can't the conversation revolve around, I don't know, which policy ideas are better?

For the legislators themselves, it's often because their coalitions are fragile and narrowly defined. During the health-care-reform debate, pro- and anti-abortion-rights Democrats agreed to keep abortion funding off the table. So instead, they [had a bare-knuckles proxy fight](#) about which group's plan more perfectly preserved the abortion-funding status quo. An explicit debate over whether and how federal dollars should be used for abortion coverage might well have derailed the whole bill.

But that doesn't mean the rest of us need to have the same conversation that Congress boxes itself into. The VAWA reauthorization bill includes the ability to give tribal authorities the ability to prosecute non-Native American men who abuse Native American women. It includes an increase in visas for undocumented domestic

violence victims who cooperate with law enforcement. And it explicitly states that domestic violence service workers can't discriminate based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Yet for every piece I see that discusses all this, I see ten about how someone claims the Republicans are willing to throw women under the bus so they can stand their ground in opposition to these new provisions, or that the Democrats strategically added them as "poison pills" to force Republicans into a politically untenable spot.

Yes, and yes. That's politics. But what about the provisions themselves? They would provide services to more domestic violence victims and fight against impunity for their abusers. The fact that this constitutes a poison pill says a lot about the state of our politics, but the important story here is not about which senator is being sneakiest. It's about victims of abuse, and a good bill that would do more to help them.