

Pro-Life Politics

'We Want Our Party Back,' Democrats Told

Washington (NC) -- Asserting that "we want our party back," National Pro-Life Democrats, a new organization claiming 2,000 dues-paying members and some 4,000 more supporters, has challenged the Democratic Party to stop backing legal abortion.

In testimony prepared for the Democratic Party platform committee, meeting in Washington, the NPLD asserted that "the majority of grassroots Democrats are pro-life."

"We are pro-life Democrats, and we want our party back," the organization said in its testimony, presented by Rita Radich, executive director, at a June 12

news conference. She later addressed the platform committee in person.

The NPLD said it had gathered some 5,000 signatures on petitions to Democratic National Committee chairman Charles Manatt urging the party to end its support for legal abortion and expressing "outrage at the irresponsible pro-abortion position which has been adopted by the Democratic National Committee."

"The majority of Democratic women are pro-life. The majority of blacks, Hispanics, youth are pro-life. More union members are pro-life than pro-abortion," Ms. Radich said.

"National Pro-Life Democrats represents the grassroots Democrats who are pro-life first and Democrats second," she said in the testimony. "These are the Democrats who in the tradition of the party put the welfare of the poor, the minorities and the common man first. These are the Democrats who are proud of their party's record on civil rights. These are the Democrats who are now ashamed of their party's abdication of the most defenseless minority in our society, the unborn."

"Pro-life Democrats have in the past virtually left their party to the pro-abortionists," she added. "We are no longer content to do so."

NPLD urged the platform committee to "at least eliminate any plank on abortion this year" in the party platform, being drafted for adoption at the July 16-19 Democratic National Convention.

The 1980 Democratic platform said that "the Democratic Party supports the 1973 Supreme Court decision on abortion rights as the law of the land and opposes any constitutional amendment to restrict or overturn that decision."

At least one other group presenting testimony to the platform committee urged the Democrats to retain their support for legalized abortion.

Message to Dems: Oppose Nukes, Abortion

Washington (NC) -- Auxiliary Bishop Eugene A. Marino of Washington, testifying for the U.S. Catholic Conference June 12, said the Democratic Party platform should promote protection of life by opposing nuclear war and abortion.

Bishop Marino told the Democratic Party platform committee, holding hearings in Washington, that the Catholic Church's social teaching underscores "two fundamental truths" -- that "human life is uniquely sacred and...essentially social."

"In speaking of human dignity and the sanctity of life, we are compelled to give priority to two issues today," the bishop said. The two issues, which he said the bishops "have been particularly vocal about," are "the prevention of nuclear war and the protection of unborn human life."

Referring to criticism from some quarters that the bishops are unwisely linking those two issues, Bishop Marino said the two need different approaches.

"But it is clear to us that the sanctity -- indeed the survival -- of human life is at stake in both. It is likewise clear that in both cases our nation faces grave problems which cry out for a re-direction of public policy."

The testimony, which was also to be submitted to Republican Party officials,

reiterated positions developed previously by the bishops through pastoral letters, congressional testimony and statements on political responsibility. The USCC is the public policy agency of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Listing specific issues alphabetically, the USCC testimony covered these topics:

ABORTION

"Abortion directly destroys an unborn human being and thus violates the right to life. A legal system which permits abortion contradicts the principle that human rights are inherent and inalienable," the USCC said.

The bishops urged a reversal of the 1973 Supreme Court ruling legalizing abortion and urged the platform committee to support passage of a constitutional amendment to outlaw abortion.

The testimony also said "public funding policies should encourage childbirth over abortion" and noted that the bishops oppose public funding of abortion.

While not mentioning the proposed Equal Rights Amendment by name, the bishops said "we support legal equity for women and reject efforts to link abortion 'rights' to this objective." The bishops said that "women's equity measures should be

scrutinized and, where necessary, amended, so that their legitimate and important goals are not exploited as vehicles for abortion and abortion funding."

The testimony also urged the platform committee "to reaffirm equal protection under law for all, including persons with disabilities..."

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

The USCC noted that the bishops' 1983 pastoral on nuclear war "condemns the counter-city of counter-population use of nuclear weapons; rejects the notion of waging limited nuclear war...and questions the moral acceptability of policies that contemplate the initiation of nuclear war to repel a conventional attack, as is the case in NATO strategy."

"Our judgment of 'strictly conditional moral acceptance of nuclear deterrence' means that the deployment of certain kinds of new weapons systems not clearly essential to deterrence should be avoided," the testimony said. The bishops also recommended "a bilateral, verifiable and negotiated halt to all new nuclear weapons deployment" and "intensified negotiations" to reduce nuclear arsenals.

CIVIL RIGHTS

Because "millions of our fellow Americans continue to be deprived of their civil rights because of race, sex or ethnic background," the bishops said, "renewed and effective action is required on the part of government, the private sector, and individual citizens to eradicate unjust discrimination in all its forms so that all Americans can exercise their basic human rights."

The testimony also touched on crime and criminal justice, economic assistance to developing countries, education, employment and income, food and agricultural policy, health care, housing, human rights, mass media, and regional conflicts.

The bishops declared their support for gun control laws and against capital punishment. The testimony also addressed the Middle East and southern Africa. The bishops said that "the religious communities with roots in the Middle East must reflect the best of our traditions in supporting the movement for peace with justice for all people of the region."

Discussing South Africa, they said that "U.S. foreign policy and its influence on corporate activity" in that nation "should be directed toward needed change in South Africa and in its relations with neighboring states."

Broad Range of Issues Urged to Pro-Lifers

Kansas City, Mo. (NC) -- The pro-life message will not be diluted by addressing a broad range of issues from abortion to nuclear disarmament, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago said at the National Right to Life convention.

Participants at the June 7-9 convention

heard a videotape from President Reagan, who was endorsed for re-election by National Right to Life Committee leaders, and talks by the Rev. Jerry Falwell, Franciscan Father Bruce Ritter and Bishop John J. Sullivan of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

Dr. John Willke, president of the NRL

Committee, saying that "the number one issue for us is the fall election," called the endorsement of Reagan a clear-cut decision between the president, who Willke said is very supportive of pro-life issues, and the Democratic candidates, who Willke said are all pro-abortion.

Willke was elected NRLC president and Wanda Franc was elected vice president June 4. Willke served three terms as president before being succeeded by Jean Doyle in 1983.

In his address June 7, Cardinal Bernardin stressed the need "to cast our case in broadly defined terms, in a way which elicits support from others. We need to shape our position consciously in a way designed to generate interest in the abortion question from individuals who thus far have not been touched by our witness or our arguments."

"Casting our perspectives broadly does not mean diluting its content," the cardinal said, adding that he is convinced that a "linkage between abortion and other issues is both morally correct and tactically necessary for the pro-life position..."

Cardinal Bernardin, chairman of the U.S. bishops' pro-life committee, had been criticized earlier by some pro-life leaders when he urged promotion of a "consistent ethic of life" that would include opposition not only to abortion but capital punishment and the arms race.

One cannot, the cardinal told the convention, "claim to be truly pro-life if one applies the principle of the sanctity of life to other issues but rejects it in the case of abortion. By the same token one cannot, with consistency, claim to be truly pro-life if one applies the principle to others but holds that the direct killing of innocent non-combatants in warfare is morally justified."

He called the linkage theme "an opportunity to win 'friends' for the life issues. Building bridges to people working on specific life issues demands respect and kindness toward these potential allies. An atmosphere of trust and understanding can do a great deal to promote the goals of the pro-life movement."

Cardinal Bernardin said the basic moral principle that the direct killing of the

innocent is always wrong is so fundamental in Catholic theology "that the need to defend it in the multiple cases of abortion, warfare, and care of the handicapped and terminally ill is self-evident."

The state has positive moral responsibilities, he continued, "including both the protection of innocent life from attack and the enhancement of human life at every stage of its development. If civil law can be neutral when innocent life is under attack, the implications for law and morality in our society are truly frightening."

Sandra Faucher, director of the NRL Political Action Committee, called the re-election of Reagan the top priority. She also said there would be "a positive gender gap" with more women voting pro-life than in support of abortion rights.

The PAC will spend \$750,000 this year in support of pro-life candidates from both parties, she said.

In a videotape shown to the conference, Reagan praised members as "a powerful army, marching in the name of human life" and said "abortion as a means of birth control must stop."

Reagan promised to continue his support of every effort to legally protect the unborn and asked for an "all-out commitment" to help him convince Americans to preserve human life.

Father Ritter, founder of New York's Covenant House for runaway youths, told the audience that his work paralleled the work of pro-lifers because both groups deal with children who are unwanted and are in danger, whether they be in the mother's womb or unwanted in the parents' home.

He stressed that every human has the right to a life in the best possible situation. However, he said, the work that he does counseling "street kids" points out that few of them have hope for survival. The same, he added, could be true of a fetus since the 1973 Supreme Court ruling legalizing abortion.

Part of the nation's problem is that "we live in a sex-for-sale society," according to Father Ritter, and this acceptance of pornography teaches young people to believe that promiscuous sex is all right. He called on the audience to teach responsible sexuality to their children.



Hospitality

Rita Carberry, right, of St. Mary's parish council, hosts visitors and shows them parish memorabilia during the recent historical walking tour that was part of the sesquicentennial celebration for both the City of Rochester and Old St. Mary's.

Child Column Wins Award

The Courier-Journal won the 1984 Catholic Press Association third place award for Best Regular Column: Family Life, for "All in the Family," written by Sarah Child. "Her columns show understanding and knowledge of the things that

cause difficulties in families and (they) treat these matters sympathetically and with great discernment," the judges noted. First place went to the Catholic Herald of Milwaukee and second to Catholic Twin Circle.

Holiday Deadline

Because of the July 4 holiday, the Courier-Journal deadline for that issue will be noon, Wednesday, June 27. As is the usual custom, the office will be closed the week of July 1; and no issue will be published July 11.