

Abortion issue in election forefront

Nancy Frazier O'Brien/CNS

WASHINGTON — In the Catholic world, at least, few issues have gotten more attention than abortion during the 2004 presidential campaign.

But putting aside the question of Communion for Catholic politicians, no issue shows a clearer distinction between the major party candidates, Republican President George W. Bush and Democratic Sen. John F. Kerry of Massachusetts.

As president, Bush has signed the ban on partial-birth abortions, which his administration has defended against court challenges; signed the Born Alive Infants Protection Act; reinstated the "Mexico City policy" that bars the use of U.S. foreign aid to promote abortions in other countries; denied federal funds to the U.N. Population Fund; and nominated pro-life federal judges.

Kerry voted six times against the partial-birth abortion ban; was a co-

sponsor of the Freedom of Choice Act, which would have prohibited states from placing limits on abortion; opposes parental involvement in minors' abortion decisions; and has vowed to reverse the Mexico City policy and to "only appoint Supreme Court justices who will uphold a woman's right to choose."

"President Bush has compiled a record during his first term in office that can only be described as extraordinarily pro-life," Steven Ertelt, editor and founder of *LifeNews.com*, said in an editorial.

"And when it comes to the key battles and judicial appointments over the next four years, only President Bush can be trusted to advance the cause of life," Ertelt added in the Aug. 3 editorial.

The National Right to Life Committee, which tracks the voting records of members of Congress on key pro-life legislation, gives Kerry a 2 percent pro-life voting record since 1984, saying he voted 92 out of



Reuters/CNS

Supporters of legal abortion show their commitment to the Democratic party nominees for president and vice president, Sen. John Kerry and Sen. John Edwards, at the Democratic National Convention in Boston in July. The National Right to Life Committee has given Kerry, a Catholic, a 2 percent pro-life voting record since 1984.

94 times against the position taken by the pro-life organization.

Kerry's running mate, Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina, joined the Senate in 1998 and has voted 11 out of 11 times against the National Right to Life Committee's position on abortion-related legislation.

In "Faithful Citizenship," their quadrennial statement issued every presidential election year since 1976, the U.S. bishops call abortion "the deliberate killing of a human being before birth" and say it is "never morally acceptable."

More recently, in their June 18 statement on "Catholics in Political Life," the bishops said, "Failing to protect the lives of innocent and defenseless members of the human race is to sin against justice."

"Those who formulate law therefore have an obligation in conscience to work toward correcting morally defective laws, lest they be guilty of cooperating in evil and in sinning against the common good," they added.

Christopher M. Duncan, chairman of the political science department at the Marianist-run University of Dayton in Ohio, said it is difficult to assess what role the abortion issue will play in the decisions of individual voters — even Catholic voters — in the 2004 presidential election.

He said most polls show that "Catholics mirror the general population in their opinions on abortion," with about 55 percent favoring keeping abortion legal in some circumstances — most notably, to save the life of the mother and in cases of rape and incest — and fewer than 10 percent supporting the criminalization of abortion in all circumstances.

Because Kerry is Catholic, the abortion issue "has become more of an issue than it would have been" for

another Democratic candidate, the political scientist said.

But abortion's biggest role in this campaign may be as a "leveraging tool to suggest that John Kerry doesn't know what he believes in," Duncan said.

Kerry himself has contributed to that impression with conflicting — and often confusing — statements about when he believes life begins and how that belief affects his stand on abortion.

In early July, the Democratic candidate startled many of his followers — and raised the hackles of his supporters who are working to keep abortion legal — when he told the Dubuque (Iowa) *Telegraph Herald*, "I oppose abortion, personally. I don't like abortion. I believe life does begin at conception."

But in follow-up interviews with ABC News and The Associated Press, Kerry said although he believed unborn children were "a form of life," they were "not the form of life that takes personhood in the terms that we have judged it to be in the past."

How much effect does a president really have on abortion policy?

A president's most long-standing effect on abortion might be in his appointments to the U.S. Supreme Court, the ultimate arbiter of the question.

Court observers say four justices are likely to retire in the next four years. Kerry has said he would not appoint a Supreme Court justice who would vote to overturn the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision on abortion.

LifeNews.com's Ertelt, in an Aug. 10 follow-up to his editorial, said that likely turnover means that "the next president will have the power to determine whether abortion will remain legal for the next 30 years."

Advertisement

Priests Host May or July 2005
Departures for a 2-Week

Alaska Cruise

And Pacific Northwest Vacation

On May 24, 2005 join your Spiritual Director Father Mel Bennett, pastor of St. Bernard Catholic Church in Crawfordsville, Indiana, on this 15-day vacation including a seven-day deluxe Alaska Cruise with Holland America Line and a seven-day Pacific Northwest vacation. Or travel during the peak season for \$300 more departing July 22, 2005 with your spiritual Director Msgr. Kenneth Steffen co-pastor of six parishes in the Springfield, Illinois Diocese. **Mass will be celebrated daily on board ship for those in the group who wish to participate.**

Your group will fly into Seattle for a night before a scenic motor coach drive to Vancouver where you'll board your five-star Holland America Line cruise ship. Next, travel through a wondrous maze of forested island and glacier carved fjords, past charming coastal villages, migrating whales and calving glaciers to Juneau, Skagway, Ketchikan and spectacular Glacier Bay. After the cruise you'll start a six-night motor coach tour visiting British Columbia, the Cascade Mountains, Washington, the Grand Coulee Dam, Lake Coeur d'Alene, Montana, Yellowstone (Old Faithful) and Grand Teton National Parks, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Idaho Falls, Utah, the Great Salt Lake, Mormon Tabernacle, and more. You'll fly home after a night in Salt Lake City. Prices for this 15-day vacation start at only \$1680 (per person, double occupancy) including port charges and taxes, and includes lots of escorted motor coach sightseeing throughout the Pacific Northwest, the seven-day deluxe Alaska cruise, seven nights in quality hotels, transfers, and baggage handling. Add \$500 for round trip airfare from Rochester, NY. \$100 deposits are now due. Friends and family are welcome.

For information, reservations, brochure, and Father's letter call:

'YOUR MAN' TOURS 1-800-968-7626

Carefree Vacations Since 1967!

Open 7 days a Week