

Poll Finds Majority of Americans Pro-Life

✖ **May 18, 2009** – For the first time in 15 years, a majority of Americans consider themselves pro-life, according to a Gallup Poll released Friday.

In a May 7-10 survey of 1,015 adults, researchers found that 51 percent of Americans consider themselves pro-life while 42 percent describe themselves as pro-choice. Just a year ago, 50 percent of respondents were pro-choice, and 44 percent were pro-life. Previously, the highest percentage of Americans to ever consider themselves pro-life was 46 percent in August 2001 and May 2002.

Views on whether abortion should be legal are almost the same on both ends—23 percent say it should be illegal in all circumstances and 22 percent say it should be legal in all cases. Roughly 37 percent of Americans say abortion should be legal in only a few circumstances.

Gallup attributed the shift to an increase in the percentage of Republicans who identify as pro-life. In the last year, the percentage of pro-life Republicans and Independents who lean Republican has risen by 10 percent, increasing from 60 percent to 70 percent. Catholics and Protestants, too, have seen increases in their pro-life constituents. The Gallup poll found a 7 percent increase among Catholics and an 8 percent jump among Protestants who identify themselves as pro-life.

Concerned Women for America President Wendy Wright said the “dramatic shift” may be due in large part to President Obama’s support for abortion.

In the first months of his administration, Obama reversed the

Mexico City Policy, which prohibited federal funding for overseas abortions, loosened restrictions on embryonic stem cell research; made moves that would have prevented medical professionals from opting out of abortion procedures as a matter of conscience; and nominated pro-choice Gov. Kathleen Sebelius as Health and Human Services Secretary.

“Barack Obama has revealed what ‘pro-choice’ means—taxpayer-funded abortions, eliminating common-sense regulations, rescinding protections for doctors and medical providers who decline to participate in abortion,” Wright said. “‘Pro-choice’ means taking away people’s choices—a baby’s right to live, a woman’s right to know the harms of abortion before she undergoes one, taxpayers’ right not to be forced to pay for other people’s abortions, medical providers’ freedom not to participate in abortions.

“Ironically, Obama’s radical abortion policies and nominees may have helped make America more pro- life.”

Observers also note that more young adults, particular young evangelicals, are pro-life. Richard Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said pro-life advocates are “winning the battle for hearts and minds in our culture on the life issue.”

“I have been telling people in the media for years that the pro-life movement has yet to crest in the United States and that it is a vibrant, growing, youthful movement,” Land said. “One cannot attend the pro-life rallies that I attend across the country and fail to notice the youth, the energy and the commitment of the men and women, boys and girls in attendance. The figures have been trending in this direction for years.”

The poll came just two days before Obama gave the commencement address at Notre Dame University, a Catholic institution widely criticized for having a pro-choice president as a

speaker and as the recipient of an honorary doctoral degree.

During his speech Sunday, Obama addressed the abortion issue head on, calling for those on both sides of the debate to reduce the number of women seeking abortion, make adoption more available, and provide care and support for women who carry their children to term.

He also called for the creation of a "sensible conscience clause" that ensures health care policies are "grounded not only in sound science, but also in clear ethics, as well as respect for the equality of women."

"I do not suggest that the debate surrounding abortion can or should go away," Obama said as both Catholic and Protestant pro-life activists protested outside the venue. "Because no matter how much we may want to fudge it—indeed, while we know that the views of most Americans on the subject are complex and even contradictory—the fact is that at some level, the views of the two camps are irreconcilable. Each side will continue to make its case to the public with passion and conviction. But surely we can do so without reducing those with differing views to caricature."

"Remember that each of us, endowed with the dignity possessed by all children of God, has the grace to recognize ourselves in one another; to understand that we all seek the same love of family, the same fulfillment of a life well lived," he added. "Remember that in the end, in some way we are all fishermen."

Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the pro-life Susan B. Anthony List, said the president's speech was disingenuous. She pointed to Obama's recommendation that Congress repeal the Dornan Amendment, a law that prevents taxpayer-funded abortion in the District of Columbia, whose budget is appropriated each

year by Congress.

“America deserves authentic leadership on the abortion issue—someone who will help find common ground through civil discourse,” Dannenfelser said. “Yet there is no evidence of an open mind in President Obama’s recommendation that Congress fund abortion on-demand with taxpayer dollars. No true leader on a ‘heart-wrenching,’ ‘complex issue’ would seek to set it aside publicly while advancing quietly to achieve his own goals, all the while positing that the two sides are irreconcilable. True common ground exists. He is just not standing on it.”

During the 2008 president election, several Christian leaders joined Obama in calling for a reduction in abortion during the Democratic National Convention. Among them was Joel Hunter, pastor of 7,000-member Northland, A Church Distributed in Florida, and Jim Wallis, founder of the social justice network Sojourners.

On Monday, Brian McLaren, author of the best-seller *A New Kind of Christian*, said the president’s Notre Dame speech embodied the kind of “respectful discourse” needed when addressing contentious issues such as abortion.

“I was especially interested by his story about fishermen,” McLaren wrote on the *Washington Post*’s On Faith blog, “not only because I wet a line quite often myself, but also because I think there is something quite wise and profound in the point of the story: We can find, in our common humanity, common ground from which we can join to seek the common good.”