

Are Pro-Life Democrats the Party Stepchild?

Pro-life Democrats. No, that's not a mistake. In fact, it's a group that's some 21-million strong. Still, **pro-life Democrats** are the first to admit they're not exactly the life of the Democrat Party.

"You know, it's really tough to be a **social justice**, pro-life citizen. It really is tough," Steve Schneck, director of the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at Catholic University, told CBN News.

Pro-life Democrats like former Michigan Rep. Bart Stupak witnessed just how tough it can be with a lackluster showing at an event they sponsored at last month's national convention.

"We seem to acknowledge all the big diversity within our party but when it comes to life it's awful silent," Stupak said.

Democrats first added abortion to their platform in 1976. This year the platform states:

"The Democratic Party strongly and unequivocally supports Roe v. Wade and a woman's right to make decisions regarding her pregnancy, including a safe and legal abortion, regardless of ability to pay. We oppose any and all efforts to weaken or undermine that right."

Pro-lifers in the party petitioned the platform committee to add language acknowledging there are differences of opinion on abortion. Their request was denied, but party leaders say that doesn't mean their message wasn't heard.

"We invited them, we enthusiastically asked them to be a part of that process because we know that they are at home under

our big tent,” Derrick Harkins, director of DNC Faith Outreach, said. “So I’d say to anybody, not only do we understand that that perspective exists, but we welcome it as a part of the larger discussion.”

Not to Be Ignored

If the party doesn’t listen, it could weaken the Democrat brand. Stupak said he’s studied history and found there tends to be a constant of 176 pro-choice Democrats serving in the House of Representatives.

If Democrats want to regain the majority, they need 218 seats, a number Stupak and others say the party can’t win without candidates like them.

“No party, whether Democrat or Republican, can rely on just one section for the majority. They need us; we need them,” Stupak said.

Limiting **abortions** is something they say a majority of Democrats agree on. Democrats for Life cited a 2011 Gallup poll, which found the following:

- 61 percent of Democrats support parental consent for minors.
- 60 percent support a 24-hour waiting period for women seeking an abortion.
- Nearly 60 percent support a ban on partial birth abortions.

Still, instead of fighting an uphill battle, why not just switch loyalties to the pro-life friendly Republican Party? The answer: because they’re Democrats.

“If you were looking at a Republican Party that had compassionate conservatives that was in favor of building a really thick social net, I think it would be a much more complicated question and I might very well be on the Republican side,” Schneck explained.

Government Support

For Schneck and others, part of the “life” issue is the promise of government support for pregnant women. They say women who believe they’ll have financial help after the birth of their child are less likely to abort their pregnancy.

“As a person who was on food stamps I know how important that was in terms of helping me feed my child once he was born,” former Pennsylvania Rep. Kathy Dahlkemper told CBN News.

Dahlkemper got pregnant when she was 21 years old. She wasn’t married and said she’s thankful for the government assistance she received.

“I actually went back and finished my college degree and was able to do that because there was some support for me to do that and then went on and never used government assistance again,” she said.

“If Democrats were more inclusive of pro-life positions in their platform, they could potentially attract people of faith currently turned off by the party’s stance,” she reasoned.

Give Us a Voice!

According to Rob Schenck, president of Faith and Action, pro-life Democrats “are marginalized, ostracized, even censored in the Democratic Party.”

“That’s why the Democrats no longer have people like me,” he charged. “But they could have people like me if they would give this powerful conviction voice in their national platform.”

Dahlkemper believes the issue comes down to money.

“The extreme right and the extreme left on this issue can raise a lot of money when this issue is a prominent issue out there in the public forum,” she said.

Still, her former House colleague Stupak said he thinks

Democrats will eventually come around.

“Being in the minority for a while has a way of bringing you around to good common sense and going out and finding good **pro-life Democrats** to get back in the majority,” he said.