

In the Two Major Party Platforms, 'Night and Day' Differences on Abortion

2016 has proven to be a heated, divisive election year, and the two major party platform planks on abortion reflect that intensity. Following two weeks of conventions packed with speeches and spectacle, what principles do they stand on?

Comparing their stated goals highlights how each party regards lives in the womb—with Republicans seeking a Human Life Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, while Democrats seek unfettered access to abortion in America and around the world funded by U.S. taxpayers.

The 2016 Republican Party Platform has been lauded (and vilified) as the most pro-life platform in the 162-year history of the party, while the final 2016 Democratic Party Platform must be deemed the most pro-abortion statement of principles since it was founded in 1828.

Do the platforms even matter? A formal set of principles and policy goals, political platforms are the intellectual foundation on which party members legislate. In fact, a study by one political scientist found that, "Overall, Democrats in Congress voted for positions that matched their platforms 74 percent of the time in the past 30 years, while Republicans did so 89 percent of the time."

Clearly, party platforms help determine the course of our nation—particularly on the most controversial issues. Because our nation has historically held to a two-party system, this analysis will center on the Democratic and Republican platforms.

Three lesser-known parties are also fielding candidates this

year. The Green Party supports abortion on demand, while the Libertarian Party holds that this ethical issue should have no bearing on federal law. The Constitution Party, on-track to be represented on approximately 20 states' ballots, has a strongly pro-life plank in its platform.

Examining the Democratic Party platform plank on abortion is a good starting point to compare the two major parties. It says in part:

"We will appoint judges who defend the constitutional principles of liberty and equality for all, and will protect a woman's right to safe and legal abortion. ... We believe unequivocally, like the majority of Americans, that every woman should have access to quality reproductive health care services, including safe and legal abortion—regardless of where she lives, how much money she makes, or how she is insured.

We believe that reproductive health is core to women's, men's, and young people's health and wellbeing. We will continue to stand up to Republican efforts to defund Planned Parenthood health centers, which provide critical health services to millions of people. We will continue to oppose—and seek to overturn—federal and state laws and policies that impede a woman's access to abortion, including by repealing the Hyde Amendment."

LiveActionNews reports that "The platform goes further than previous Democratic platforms on women's reproductive rights. It champions Planned Parenthood health centers and commits to push back on all Republican efforts to defund it." Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of pro-life advocacy group Susan B. Anthony List, stated: "There is no further left for the Democratic Party to go on the abortion issue."

The advocacy group Democrats for Life of America has been particularly vocal this year, noting how the platform "calls

for taxpayer funding of abortion and celebrates abortion.” Former Obama Administration official Michael Wear co-authored a USA Today op-ed where he stated, “Wherever you stand on abortion, forcing people to pay for it can’t be good for Democrats, or for democracy.”

In stark contrast, the 2016 Republican Platform includes many sections advocating pro-life policies—including protection of the disabled and conscience rights for medical professionals. The essential paragraphs regarding abortion policy read as follows:

“The Constitution’s guarantee that no one can ‘be deprived of life, liberty or property’ deliberately echoes the Declaration of Independence’s proclamation that ‘all’ are ‘endowed by their Creator’ with the inalienable right to life. Accordingly, we assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment’s protections apply to children before birth.

We oppose the use of public funds to perform or promote abortion or to fund organizations, like Planned Parenthood, so long as they provide or refer for elective abortions or sell fetal body parts rather than provide healthcare. We urge all states and Congress to make it a crime to acquire, transfer, or sell fetal tissues from elective abortions for research, and we call on Congress to enact a ban on any sale of fetal body parts.”

While this language clarifying the 14th Amendment has been part of every Republican platform since 1980, this year the party platform also urges states to bar the nation’s largest abortion provider—Planned Parenthood—from receiving any taxpayer funding. After the appalling practices at abortion centers were uncovered by a recent hidden-camera investigation, it’s a reasonable and ethical position.

The GOP platform also goes a step further by strongly supporting parental rights, opposing “school-based clinics that provide referral or counseling for abortion and contraception.” In 2012, the New York City schools distributed 12,721 doses of Plan B, the morning after pill, without parental approval. With abortion rates higher than any other metro area, New York City—where Planned Parenthood was founded in 1916—is considered the epicenter of America’s abortion epidemic.

The Republican platform also supports the Hyde Amendment, a 40-year-old policy enacted in law, which cuts off any direct taxpayer funding of abortion. The document explicitly condemns the recent *Whole Women’s Health v. Hellerstedt* decision striking down abortion regulations in Texas, an activist court ruling that could affect other states.

Praising the Born-Alive Infant Protection Act, the platform also calls for the passage of the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act—a bill opposing infanticide currently awaiting a vote in the U.S. Senate. The platform language urges Congress to enact the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act prohibiting abortion after twenty weeks, the point at which medical research shows that unborn babies can feel excruciating pain during abortions.

Despite principles stated so clearly in the platforms, the winds of populism have given America two major candidates widely viewed as unprincipled. Indeed, Whom do you dislike less? has become a frequent question among U.S. voters... a question that some conservatives believe has no good answer.

So it is that many may decide based on the party platforms. Addressing the differences reflected in the two platforms, Tony Perkins of Family Research Council summed it up: “Light and dark, night and day—I mean, they could not be further apart. It’s almost every position that the Republicans have taken in support of human life, in support of conscience

rights, the Democratic Party has taken the opposite position.”

Be prepared, voters. Election Day will be here before we know it. My encouragement to friends is to do their homework, read party platform planks on abortion and life issues, pray for God’s guidance—and decide for yourself. I believe the vote you cast this November will affect many lives.

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