

Sen. Steve Daines on Pope Francis' Congressional Address and How to Be a Disarming Pro-Life Voice

"My walk is a public one. My business is in the world, and I must mix in the assemblies of men or quit the post which Providence seems to have assigned me."—William Wilberforce

Montana Senator Steve Daines is one of many inspired by British abolitionist, philanthropist and parliamentarian William Wilberforce—a voice for the voiceless in his day, when the injustice of slavery was widespread across the British Empire.

Most admirers of Wilberforce, though, do not serve in Congress. As he shared recently, Daines sees a lot of himself in how God called Wilberforce to be a public servant. It took 40 years to build a diverse coalition in the British Parliament, and finally see the legalized slave trade abolished in 1833.

Like the revered evangelical legislator, Daines works on a cause directly aligned with his Christian faith—the defense of pre-born lives—and he's among those raising a persistent alarm about the injustices they face.

He shares in this final part of our interview about several initiatives in Congress that people of faith should be watching closely.

Bound4LIFE: On Sept. 24, Pope Francis will visit Washington, D.C., for an historic event—addressing Senate and House Members together in a joint session speech, as no Pope has

ever done before. Do you believe this will be significant?

Steve Daines: I am very grateful for the Catholic Church and its unwavering stance on life. They have been a consistent, uncompromising voice defending life—and I am looking forward to hearing the Pope address Congress.

I hope and assume he will strongly voice his belief that we need to protect the unborn. There has been talk of the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act being debated on the Senate floor during the week of his visit, which I believe is a wise approach.

Bound4LIFE: When the Pain-Capable bill is voted on, people will be discussing the issue of abortion—on the Senate floor, on talk shows and among citizens. What do you hope people take away from those conversations?

Daines: It's important we have thoughtful discussions as late-term abortion comes up with friends or colleagues. With this issue, public opinion is on our side.

One of the thoughtful questions we could be asking is, "Have you ever gone to Google and typed in '20-week baby' or '20-week fetus'? Try it and click on the images." Suddenly your friend will see what a 20-week-old baby looks like in the womb. That image is clearly a unique life.

It's healthy to raise these questions. People only believe what they discover for themselves. We need to have civil discussions and look at what the facts and the truth are.

Bound4LIFE: Shifting legislative gears somewhat, you recently co-sponsored the First Amendment Defense Act. Why does this issue of religious freedom matter, even for citizens who do not practice any faith?

Daines: When we look at the First Amendment to the Constitution, No. 1 of the 10 amendments known as the Bill of

Rights, it starts with: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Of the five rights listed in the First Amendment—religion, speech, press, assembly and petition—the very first right protected is freely exercising our religion.

My great-great-grandmother who came from Norway to America came for economic freedom, but more importantly she came for religious freedom. It is part of my family history, why they came to America: for the freedom to practice their own religion without the government interfering with it.

This is foundational for our country, and we must lead on religious freedom as an example in America. And with our nation's role in the world, we have the ability to help protect the freedom of religion around the globe.

Bound4LIFE: It does seem very contentious right now, as many pastors consider if they can still address moral and social issues from the pulpit. What is your message to pastors concerned about our nation's direction?

Daines: I am grateful for the men and women who pastor, who lead in churches across our country. Ultimately, their role of loving people and seeing hearts changed is probably the greatest calling.

To pastors and leaders who serve faithfully, who work to teach and shepherd those who are in your church or religious institution: Thank you for all you do.

In the government, we have a very important responsibility to protect the rights of our pastors and religious leaders. They have the freedom to speak out about what they believe, without fear of repercussions from their very own government.

I am very concerned about the lack of tolerance coming from

those who say they want to see more tolerance in the public square. We've seen some of those individuals are very intolerant of religious freedom and expression.

Bound4LIFE: As Christians, this journey of faith we are on is a lifelong call to become more like Jesus Christ every day. What do you find to be the most challenging aspect of that calling?

Daines: Knowing how far short I fall of the glory of God—whether it's motives or actions—walking it out is about setting Christ always before me. I'm grateful for the grace of God and His mercies.

There is not enough time in the day to address all these challenges we face. I pray for wisdom in prioritizing issues and working on the things God would intend, so one day we too will hear those words: "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Reprinted with permission from Bound4LIFE

Marisa Lengor Kwaning is a writer, editor and health policy analyst who resides in Washington, D.C. She has worked in public health, disaster management, as well as foreign and domestic health policy. She earned a Masters degree in Public Policy from George Mason University and contributes to Bound4LIFE International, a faith-based pro-life group.