

Why Pro-Life Democrats Are Gaining Ground in Local Politics

The evisceration of pro-life Democrats from Congress is all but complete. Attacked by both Democrats and Republicans and pro-life and pro-choice activists, most of these legislators have been either forced to change their views or defeated at the ballot box.

The handful who remain may not be long for this political world. The fundraising group EMILY's List and other abortion-rights organizations are targeting pro-life Democrats such as Illinois Rep. Dan Lipinski, who barely squeaked by in the last election. It is likely only a matter of time before party orthodoxy on abortion expels yet another heretic from its midst.

The most disappointing former pro-life Democrat, however, has been the senior senator from Pennsylvania, Bob Casey Jr.

Casey's father, a beloved Democratic governor of the Keystone State, was a bona fide leader of the pro-life movement. I've defended his son in the past, even recently suggesting he should run for president in a wide-open pro-life lane in 2020.

Though he has taken some good anti-abortion votes and been very helpful when it comes to addressing abortion demand, recent disturbing news demonstrates that he has also been forced to capitulate to party dogma. Last week, Politico reported that Casey had attended and supported EMILY's List's annual gala, which is a little like a pig attending a hot dog convention. One the group's reasons for being is to defeat pro-life Democrats.

Important reporting on this story by found that EMILY's List

donated \$500 to Casey's 2018 campaign. It is impossible to imagine the group's supporting Casey if it foresaw him taking any meaningful votes in favor of protecting vulnerable prenatal children.

Happily, though, local Democratic parties are much more open-minded and committed to a diversity of opinion on abortion than their national counterpart.

Significantly, this commitment to diversity of opinion respects the views of people of color. Eighty-one percent of white Democrats are broadly supportive of abortion rights, while only 66% of African-American Democrats hold that view.

African-Americans and Latinos also want to see more diversity on abortion within the Democratic Party. Of white Democrats surveyed in a YouGov poll, 35% believed the Democratic Party should only support candidates who think abortion should be generally legal. For African-American Democrats that number plummeted to 7%.

Among Latino Democrats, a full 40% believe the party should only support candidates who think abortion should be illegal.

These diverse views have been reflected in recent, significant pro-life votes in North Carolina, New Mexico and Illinois.

In North Carolina, a bill recently passed that required health care professionals to provide typical medical care for newborns who survive abortions—overriding the veto of Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper—with the essential support of six Democratic legislators, none of whom was white.

In New Mexico, Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham saw eight Senate Democrats help to defeat a bill she championed to expand abortion access. Six of them were Latino.

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker promised that his state would become “the most progressive state in the nation when it comes

to guaranteeing women's reproductive rights." Unfortunately for him, this project has been hindered by the withdrawal of support from five Democrats—four of whom are African-American women.

I've written before about how capitulating to a libertarian stance that holds that government must let individuals do what they please on abortion is totally bizarre for a party committed to social justice for the most vulnerable. I've also pointed out that making modest room for pro-lifers in the national party could destroy the GOP coalition.

These recent local uprisings only make the point stronger: The Democratic Party would be much better served by taking a nuanced, big-tent approach to abortion, especially if it really wishes to give priority to marginalized voices of color. Though national Democrats are currently dominated by the monolithic views of white progressives, the laboratory of the states gives one hope that a better strategy may be in the party's future. {eo}

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