



CATHOLIC DEMOCRATS

July 8, 2016

The Honorable Dannel P. Malloy, Co-Chair, Democratic Party Platform Committee
The Honorable Shirley C. Franklin, Co-Chair, Democratic Party Platform Committee
Democratic National Committee
430 South Capitol Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003

RE: Democratic Party Platform Draft, Abortion Plank

Dear Governor Malloy and Mayor Franklin:

We are writing you today to express our objections regarding the draft abortion plank, and related language, of the Democratic Party Platform, which supports the repeal of both the Hyde and Helms Amendments, prohibiting the use of federal funds for abortion, domestically and abroad.

Catholic Democrats is an advocacy organization whose mission is to advance the Catholic Social Justice Tradition (CSJT) in the public square and within the Democratic Party, to help create a more just and peaceful society, to preserve God's creation, and to advance the notion of a "human ecology" that Pope Francis has articulated in his seminal encyclical, *Laudato Si*. We conduct our advocacy in consultation with both Catholic theologians and Canon Lawyers to ensure that we authentically represent the CSJT.

We were formed in 2004 in response to public statements by a number of Catholic bishops who politicized the Eucharist during that presidential election by denying Holy Communion to Sen. John Kerry. In subsequent years, we have refuted the assertion by many Catholic bishops and conservative Catholics that you cannot be a "good Catholic" if you vote for the Democratic candidate. We have also urged the Catholic bishops to regain their moral voice as advocates for the poor, which they once enjoyed during the 1980's and 1990's. You should also be aware that we strongly supported the passage of the Affordable Care Act, and have subsequently supported the Administration's accommodations in the implementation of the ACA. We have also supported the Administration in a broad range of policy initiatives from immigration to the rights of the LGBT community.

On the politically divisive issue of abortion, we have taken a nuanced approach that falls under the rubric of the CSJT, which centers on supporting state and federal programs that will help pregnant women bring their pregnancies to term. We do not believe that criminalizing abortion is an effective public policy to address this moral issue, in part because studies have shown that there is an inverse relationship between criminalization and the incidence of abortion. There are higher abortion rates in countries where abortion is illegal.

Like the American public, our supporters, have a range of views on abortion that cannot be defined by the political labels of "pro-choice" and "pro-life." Their views regarding the practice of abortion – and its

legality – are much more nuanced, as are the views of the electorate. Putting people into a box on this issue does not serve the best interests of either the nation or the Democratic Party.

Secretary Clinton has stated publicly that she supports the repeal of the Hyde Amendment. She has also pledged to generally build on the current policies of the Obama Administration and has expressed her commitment to preserve the current president's legacy. In this regard, we believe that repeal of the Hyde Amendment is a significant departure from current policy. This is underscored by the fact that the ACA was negotiated with the understanding, from both sides of the aisle, that the *status quo* would be preserved when it comes to abortion policy. There were both inter- and intra-party disagreement as to what constituted the *status quo*, particularly with respect to the allocation and fungibility of funds. But there was little if any disagreement that the Hyde Amendment was at the core of the debate. Such a policy departure will play into the hands of those on the Right who, at the time the ACA was passed, asserted that it was “just the beginning.”

Repealing the Hyde Amendment would be a significant departure from the *status quo*, and it would also assault the sensibilities of many people of faith who currently are generally supportive of maintaining the legality of a woman's right to choose.

Consider the following.

First, a recent poll (November 2015) by the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion, funded by the Knights of Columbus, found that a supermajority of the American public – 68% – opposes “using tax dollars to pay for a woman's abortion.”

Second, while a majority of the American public thinks that abortion should be legal in all or most circumstances, they have a very different perception of its morality. Surveys from both the Pew Research Center and the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) show that the net support for making abortion legal in all or most circumstances versus illegal in most or all circumstances has ranged from +6% to +17% since 2010, averaging +12% and +13% respectively. However, surveys taken by Pew in 2013 and PRRI in 2011 both show that the net American public opinion as to whether abortion is morally acceptable has tilted the other way, ranging from -11% and -12% (net morally acceptable less net morally wrong) respectively.

The difference between legal acceptability and moral acceptability represents the legal/moral spread (net legal less net morally wrong). If people viewed the legality and morality of abortion as being equivalent, we would expect to see a moral/legal spread close to zero. But we don't. Instead we see a spread between +25% and +30% for the general public in both the PRRI (+29% in 2011) and Pew (+26% in 2013) data.

This means that the American electorate is of two minds – one supporting the availability of abortion while the other thinking that it is morally wrong. And accompanying these two minds within the American electorate is cognitive dissonance.

Additionally, we analyzed the PRRI data set and found that the legal/moral spread is greater for Independents (+30%) and groups that have formed part of the Democratic base of support: women (+30%), Hispanic Catholics (+68%), and Black Protestants (+69%).

Third, within the electorate, there is an overlapping identity of being both “pro-choice” and pro-life.” According to the PRRI report in 2011, *Committed to Availability, Conflicted about Morality*, +36% of the American electorate simultaneously identifies as being both pro-choice and pro-life. This further suggests the nuance – and the challenges – that exists within the minds of the American public.

From a political standpoint, at a minimum, the repeal of the Hyde and Helms Amendments in the abortion plank and related language lacks prudence. While we respect the good intentions with which this is being proposed – particularly with respect to the health of the mother, not covered by the Hyde Amendment – we believe that, on balance, it will hurt the Democratic Party both in the short and long-run.

In the short-run, it is likely to hurt the Democratic Party in this year’s down ballot races – particularly in key states with significant Catholic populations such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Florida – and will mitigate the chances for the party to take back the U.S Senate and House of Representatives.

However, there is a long-term cost as well. The Democratic Party is already perceived as being significantly less friendly to religion than the GOP, deserved or not. We believe that proposing the repeal of the Hyde and Helms Amendments in the party platform will only strengthen this narrative and in a manner that will be difficult, if not impossible, to reverse in the future.

Faith is part of the American character. As a nation, we have distinguished ourselves in the developed world – as our national per capita GDP has increased, we have not experienced the commensurate decline in religiosity experienced by other developed nations. We remain the most religious country in the industrialized world. The American character has stubbornly held on to that part of our national identity formed in faith.

Thus, there are bigger issues implicit in the proposed abortion plank. The Democratic Party must ask itself if it wants to be a big tent party that is welcoming to people of faith, and whether or not it should make a concerted effort to do so.

Pew surveys, going back to 2004, can shed some light on the question.

In the most recent Pew survey (January 2016) that asked the question as to whether or not “religion as a whole is increasing its influence or losing its influence”: 68% of US adults thought that religion was losing its influence. At the same time, almost as many, 63% of US adults wanted more religion in American life (with 51% saying less religion is a “bad thing” and 12% saying more religion is “good thing”).

Given this, the Democratic Party should be mindful that, at the same time, the American public views the party as being consistently less friendly and consistently more unfriendly to religion than the Republican Party, according to Pew surveys. When we take a look at the most recent data, we see that the net friendly/unfriendly spread is + 21% (friendly less unfriendly) for the Republican Party versus +6% for the Democratic Party, a -15% spread for the Democratic Party. The trend line suggests that within a few years, the Democratic Party will have a net negative friendly/unfriendly spread.

When we take a look at the comparative net friendly/unfriendly spreads by religion, we see that the net spread for White Catholics is three times what it is for the overall population and Independents, -48% versus -15% and -16% respectively.

It should be noted that to the extent the American public has taken this view as a result of the policies of the Democratic Party with respect to abortion, we do not believe that it is warranted. The incidence of abortion has been decreasing since 1992 and declines under the Clinton and Obama administrations have outpaced those under the Bush Administration. Additionally, the early evidence strongly suggests that the ACA has contributed to reducing the incidence of abortion, in large part due to the contraceptive mandate.

However, when taken together – the significant policy change from the *status quo*; the significant opposition to the repeal of the Hyde Amendment; the American public's inherent nuanced position on abortion; a desire within the electorate for religion to have more of an influence on American life; and the Democratic Party's competitive *disadvantage* as being unfriendly to religion – all of this strongly suggests that it is imprudent, at least, to include the repeal of the Hyde and Helms Amendments in the Democratic Party Platform.

Finally, we have reviewed the abortion plank of every Democratic Party platform going back to 1976 and have found – through our Catholic Democrat sensibilities – that there is a considerable range of language used on a faith-friendly scale. In our review, we assumed that as a baseline, the Democratic Party will continue to support *Roe v. Wade* and a woman's right to choose within the context of making abortion, safe, legal and *rare*. We identified seven principles that have been articulated over the years and believe that the inclusion of these principles in this and future abortion planks will help position the Democratic Party to be more welcoming to people of all faiths. These principles, with examples from prior years, are included in the attachment to this letter.

When Secretary Clinton takes her oath of office next January as the 45th president of the United States, she will place her hand on a Bible, which will reaffirm, as it did for George Washington and others, the positive role of faith in our society. We feel compelled to address this issue with the Platform Committee because we know that faith is important both to her and to the American people.

Gov. Malloy and Mayor Franklin, if you have any questions or wish to discuss this, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration of this recommendation.

Peace,



Steven A. Krueger
President
Catholic Democrats

attachment

cc Patrice Taylor, Director of Party Affairs, Democratic National Committee



CATHOLIC DEMOCRATS

The Seven Principles of the Democratic Party Platform Abortion Plank & Examples from Prior Years 1976 to 2012

1. Recognize the religious and/or ethical nature of abortion
 - **From 1976:** *We fully recognize the religious and ethical nature of the concerns which many Americans have on the subject of abortion.*
 - **From 1980:** *We fully recognize the religious and ethical concerns which many Americans have about abortion.*
 - **From 2012:** *Abortion is an intensely personal decision between a woman, her family, her doctor, and her clergy...*
2. Asserts support for Roe v. Wade and a woman's right to choose a safe and legal abortion
 - **From 1996 & 2000:** *The Democratic Party stands behind the right of every woman to choose, consistent with Roe v. Wade...*
 - **From 2012:** *The Democratic Party... supports Roe v. Wade and a woman's right to make decisions regarding her pregnancy, including a safe and legal abortion...*
3. Assert respect for the individual conscience of every American
 - **From 1996 & 2000:** *We respect the individual conscience of each American on this difficult issue, and we welcome all our members to participate at every level of our party.*
4. Assert that the Democratic Party is a party of inclusion open to everyone's ideas
 - **From 1996 & 2000:** *The Democratic Party is a party of inclusion.*
 - **From 2000:** *This is why we are proud to put into our platform the very words which Republicans refused to let Bob Dole put into their 1996 platform and which they refused to even consider putting in their platform in 2000: "While the party remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing its historic principles and ideals, we also recognize that members of our party have deeply held and sometimes differing views on issues of personal conscience like abortion and capital punishment. We view this diversity of views as a source of strength, not as a sign of weakness, and we welcome into our ranks all Americans who may hold differing positions on these and other issues. Recognizing that tolerance is a virtue, we are committed to resolving our differences in a spirit of civility, hope and mutual respect."*
5. Assert goal/support to reduce number of unintended pregnancies
 - **From 1996 & 2000:** *Now we must continue to support efforts to reduce unintended pregnancies and we call on all Americans to take personal responsibility to meet this important goal.*
 - **From 2012:** *We also recognize that health care and education help reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and thereby also reduce the need for abortions.*

- **Note:** A more faith friendly version of this sentence would change “reduce the need for abortions” to “reduce the incidence of abortion” and read as follows: *We also recognize that health care and education help reduce unintended pregnancies and thereby also reduce the incidence of abortion.*

6. Assert goal/support to reduce the incidence for abortion

- **From 1992:** *We pledge to support contraceptive research, family planning, comprehensive family life education, and policies that support healthy childbearing and enable parents to care most effectively for their children.*
- **From 2000:** *Our goal is to make abortion less necessary and more rare, not more difficult and more dangerous.*
 - **Note:** A more faith friendly version of this sentence would change “make abortion less necessary and more rare” to “make the incidence of abortion rare” and read as follows: *Our goal is to make the incidence of abortion rare, not more difficult and dangerous.*
- **From 2004:** *Abortion should be safe, legal, and rare.*
- **From 2008:** *The Democratic Party also strongly supports a woman's decision to have a child by ensuring access to and availability of programs for pre- and post-natal health care, parenting skills, income support, and caring adoption programs.*

7. Assert the role of personal responsibility

- **From 1996 & 2000:** *Now we must continue to support efforts to reduce unintended pregnancies, and we call on all Americans to take personal responsibility to meet this important goal.*
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