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Palin's Feminists for Life membership highlights organization

by Thomas C. Fox



When Alaska Governor Sarah Palin was introduced as Senator John

McCain's vice presidential pick last week, she was quickly touted as being a staunch social conservative.

The McCain campaign let it be known that Palin is a life-long member of the National Rifle Association. She was shown shooting an M-16 assault rifle. The campaign said she opposed same sex marriages and is, of course, anti-abortion. It added that she belongs to a group called Feminists for Life (FFL).

FFL, while anti-abortion, is not comprised of women solely on the political right. Formed in 1972, through much of its history its ranks have been filled with a wide spectrum of women, many of liberal to radical political persuasions.

Rachel MacNair was president of FFL from 1984 through 1994. She told *NCR* that when she headed FFL

most in the organization were committed to opposing abortion as well as to peace and nonviolence efforts, and these efforts included stopping the violence unleashed on the unborn and women who have abortions.

FFL continues today with its focus on supporting pregnant women. Officially, FFL is a nonpartisan organization and it supports no political candidates. It wants to outlaw abortion but has never advocated prosecuting women who seek abortions.

The organization rather states the following on its Web site:

?We should criminalize anyone who withholds child support, fires a woman from her job because she is pregnant, refuses to accommodate her pregnancy, expels her from school, or threatens violence -- any act that forces her to choose between sacrificing her child and sacrificing her education, career plans, or safety from violence.

?We believe that we should hold responsible those who profit from women?s pain ?- especially the abortion industry.?

FFL, while nonpartisan, is pleased to have Palin as a member. It keeps its membership list private, but it confirmed Palin?s membership after she announced it last week.

A statement on the FFL Web site quotes FFL President Serrin Foster as saying there is a "certain excitement" that a "pro-life feminist" had been selected as a vice presidential nominee.

Foster added that the excitement also stems from the fact that both the Democratic and Republican parties are talking about ways to confront the abortion issue.

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FFL said it is pleased that the 2008 Democratic Party platform has been expanded to include a number of ?woman-centered solutions,? adding that ?resources and support are, of course, at the heart of FFL's mission.?

FFL was equally pleased that the Republican National Committee platform, which seeks to make abortions illegal, includes the FFL trademark line, "Women deserve better than abortion."

?It is unprecedented to see the platforms of both major U.S. political parties incorporate key pieces of FFL's unique message,? the FFL statement noted.

As an organization, FFL says it focuses on dealing with some of the causes of abortion. It claims an experience ?of understanding how abortion hurts women, particularly the complications abortion involves from a medical, physical and mental health standpoint.?

Beyond that, FFL says it champions the notion that one of the best ways to reduce abortion is to do the work of providing pregnant women the resources they need.

FFL says it has focused recently on efforts to make sure pregnant and parenting college students, who have the highest abortion rates in the nation, get help, like medical referrals, child-care and assistance in completing their education.

Feminists for Life?s anti-abortion position and its support for women does not lend it to be easily pigeon-

holed as conservative or liberal.

“We are really political orphans,” MacNair said. “Neither major party deals with all our concerns and many of our members come from various places on the political spectrum.”

In fact it might come as a surprise to the McCain campaign that FFL is listed as one of 198 organizations that have chosen to place themselves under the Consistent Life network. The groups under this umbrella say they are “pro-life across the board,” opposing abortion, opposing capital punishment and opposing war and opposing euthanasia. The Consistent Life network includes groups such as the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas, Pax Christi USA, Durham, N.C., Mennonite Church, Prolife Nonviolent Action Committee and Vegans for Life.

The Consistent Life network is non-denominational and includes a variety of religious and non-religious organizations, all working in some way to attack the roots of violence in our society.

Consistent Life was founded in 1987 under the name The Seamless Garment Network. It brought together pacifists of a wide variety including a group called Prolifers for Survival, dedicated to opposing nuclear arms.

The women and men at that 1987 conference drew up what they called a Seamless Garment Mission statement and the umbrella group as grown ever since.

MacNair, noting that Palin is a member of the NRA and that she apparently has no qualms shooting an M-16, said that Palin is unique in her perspective, as many in the organization seem to be.

MacNair added that this simply reinforces the notion of the diversity that exists in the Feminist For Life ranks.

(Fox is NCR interim executive editor.)

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