

Cantor: Elections re-energized pro-lifers

Julie Asher Catholic News Service | Jan. 25, 2011



March for Life participants make their way up Constitution Avenue to the Supreme Court building in Washington Jan. 24. (CNS/Peter Lockley)

WASHINGTON -- House Majority Leader Eric Cantor of Virginia said that after being out of power on Capitol Hill for the past couple of years, pro-life supporters in Congress and across the nation have been re-energized since last November's elections brought in "the biggest pro-life freshman class in memory."

"The tide has turned," Cantor said in remarks at the March for Life rally on the National Mall, held Jan. 24 to mark the 38th anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion.

Jan. 22 was the official anniversary date, but the March for Life was organized for the following Monday to allow participants to visit their representatives on the Hill after a noon rally and a march along Constitution Avenue to the Supreme Court.

Members of the House pledge to institute a government-wide ban on the use of federal funds for abortion, said Cantor. He acknowledged that any pro-life legislation will face an uphill battle in the Senate and with President Barack Obama, a supporter of keeping abortion legal, but "the people's House will stand unapologetically for life."

After a performance by the Sounds of Liberty from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., and the playing of the national anthem, Nellie Gray welcomed the crowd, thanking them for gathering in "this beautiful weather."

It was sunny but cold, hovering somewhere in the mid-20s, and marchers were bundled up against the chill.

As of mid-day Jan. 25, March for Life had not yet posted on its website an estimate for the crowd. The Catholic News Agency and Eternal Word Television Network estimated the number at hundreds of thousands. No police agency has given official crowd estimates for any demonstration in the nation's capital since 1995.

The pro-lifers created a sea of colors on the Mall and on the march. Many were high school and college students. Hundred donned matching knit caps, scarves or identical jackets to identify their group; at least one group had its members wearing bright yellow ponchos. Still others held aloft big banners that announced their

hometown, school and/or pro-life association.

Gray, now 85, is founder and president of the March for Life Education & Defense Fund -- the group that organizes the march.

She called it "an evil" that more than 50 million abortions have been performed in the United States since Roe. "We come to our government ... to bring the life principles to our government. ... We ask our government to overturn Roe v. Wade now," she told the crowd to loud applause.

There have been incremental steps in the past 38 years to try to address the fallout of what she called the "unconstitutional" court decision but nothing short of overturning Roe is acceptable, Gray said.

She said pro-life supporters had come to Washington to bring their message to Obama "with love, and we're willing to work with you ... as the president of all the people, including the preborn."

She expressed disappointment with the statement the president issued Jan. 22, in which he noted the anniversary of Roe, "the Supreme Court decision that protects women's health and reproductive freedom, and affirms a fundamental principle: that government should not intrude on private family matters. I am committed to protecting this constitutional right."

Among others who spoke at the March for Life rally was Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kan., a member of the bishops' pro-life committee. Before offering a prayer, he noted that many U.S. bishops were in the crowd with contingents from their dioceses. He introduced the Catholic bishops sitting on the speakers' platform, including Archbishop Henry J. Mansell of Hartford, Conn., and Bishops Samuel J. Aquila of Fargo, N.D., Bishop George V. Murry of Youngstown, Ohio, and Frank J. Dewane of Venice, Fla.

Other religious leaders included Rabbi Yehuda Levin of Brooklyn, N.Y.; prelates of the Orthodox Church in America, including Metropolitan Jonah of All America and Canada; and the Rev. Luke Robinson of Frederick, Md., pastor of Quinn Chapel of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Among lawmakers who addressed the crowd were U.S. Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J.; Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy of California; and U.S. Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss. The Knights of Columbus and the "Silent No More" awareness campaign also had representatives on the platform.

Smith told the crowd the country received a wake-up call about abortion with the Jan. 19 indictment of a Philadelphia doctor, Dr. Kermit B. Gosnell, who routinely performed illegal late-term abortions for more than 30 years. He and some of his associates were charged in the death of a female patient and accused of murdering seven babies born alive.

Noting the number of young people at the rally, Smith said they know abortion "is violence against women and children" and that "women deserve better."

Despite all the "breathtaking advances" in fetal medicine and today's sonogram machines, supporters of legal abortion are in denial about the humanity of an unborn child, said Smith, who called the crowd to recommit to "ever more persevering prayer, fasting and hard work" to end abortion.

Wicker said that the next day he would introduce in the Senate the Life at Conception Act, to define when life begins and extend constitutional protections "to the most vulnerable in our society."

After meeting in his office with students from his district after the rally, House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio posted a video message on his website: "I'd like to thank everyone who participated in today's March for Life, as

well as those who continue to work hard in their home states. You should be proud to know that your actions have a positive and meaningful impact."

He reiterated the new Republican majority's pledge to ban tax dollars from paying for abortion. He noted that the Jan. 21 news conference he, Smith and others held to discuss the introduction of bipartisan legislation to codify the Hyde Amendment "and similar policies and ensure that taxpayer dollars are never used to pay for elective abortions."

"Together, with the help of the American people we can make this common-sense legislation the law of the land," Boehner said.

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