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August 2004

Culture of life gets a boost from new group in South Dakota

Gene Young
 Managing Editor

There is a new group lending its voice to the culture of life in South Dakota.

Democrats for Life of South Dakota just recently became incorporated as a non-profit corporation in the state.

The group got started through the work of State Representatives Mary Glenski, Sioux Falls and Gerry Lange, Madison.

"She (Glenski) was really the one who finally took the initiative," said Lange. She took the step of getting the incorporation papers, and promoting the idea to other South Dakotans and asked them to become charter members.

Included in that group are Glenski, Lange, Bernie Hunhoff, Yankton, Mike Wilson, Rapid City, and Jim Peterson of Revillo.

The group is affiliated with Democrats for Life of America and carries the national organization's same mission statement: "Democrats for Life of America advocates respect for life from fertilization to natural death. This includes, but is not limited to opposition to abortion, capital punishment and euthanasia."

Lange says he and Glenski heard too often from people in their districts that 'you can't be a democrat and for life,' but he says that simply is not true.

"We have been vocal in the party," and will continue to speak up," he said.

Bishop Robert J. Carlson sees the group as a "life" group and not a political group. He calls it another promising sign in efforts to promote the culture of life in South Dakota.

Lange believes the newly formed group can make a difference in the Democratic party and in the state. "I guess we wouldn't have put out our money if we didn't think we could make a difference," said Lange.

Bernie Hunhoff agrees with Lange. The former gubernatorial candidate thinks it can have an impact. "I thought it was a good idea," he said. "I also hope it serves the exact opposite purpose that probably some people suspect. I hope it actually depoliticizes the life issue."

The politicization of the life issue, according to Hunhoff, has led it to basically become a stalemate, which frustrates him. "What could be more important than all these life issues?," he asked.

Hunhoff stresses how important it is for people in the state to fully recognize how many life issues there are facing us. "There are a whole variety of life issues," he said. "The abortion issue is a very important one but there are many others."

Hunhoff wants the number of life issues and their complexity to work for his new group in getting people to see that life issues should never be politicized.

So does State Representative Phyllis Heineman of Sioux Falls. While a Republican, Heineman agrees with Hunhoff's assessment. "I think any organization that encourages life and values and respects life is wonderful; whether it's Democrats, whether it's Republicans, whether it's independents," she said.

"We want to encourage anyone who respects life and will publicly say they will support any policies that support life."

Heineman is not alone in welcoming any group that publicly states it is for life.

Representative Hal Wick, a Republican, is another lawmaker who sees a positive from the emergence of the new group. "I am glad to see they are there," said Wick. He says the new group's charter members are real easy to work with some times in Pierre. "I always appreciate them," he said.

Some people think the new group will run into trouble if they try to push their "culture of life" ideas and feelings higher in the state or national party.

"With life issues, compromises are tough," said Heineman. "How do you compromise an issue like cloning. Well you can't. Life is life."

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Representative Bill Earley, also a Republican, believes the new group can make a difference but it will not be easy for them. "They can make a difference if they want to come along with those of us who are pro-life and have been pro-life and our platform is pro-life and we are going to vote for legislation to make it a criminal offense to perform abortions. That can make a difference," he said.

"I am hopeful if they have a stronger voice at the state level maybe that will eventually start affecting the national level," Heineman said. "If they can start having an impact on national office holders from the state, that will be a key. They've got to be able to have an impact on the Congressional delegation."

From Gerry Lange, "We got an organization going and we're recruiting members now."

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