

HOW CATHOLIC ARE CONGRESSIONAL CATHOLICS?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on Catholics in the new Congress:

In the 117th Congress, Catholics comprise 30% of the seats, the largest of any religious affiliation. Moreover, both the Speaker of the House and the incoming president identify as Catholic. But just how Catholic are these Catholics?

We reviewed the scorecard of incumbent representatives and senators as tallied by National Right to Life and NARAL, the two most authoritative sources measuring congressional support for the right to life and the right to abortion, respectively, in the nation. For newly elected members, we consulted their stated record on this subject when they were candidates. Here is what we found.

In the House of Representatives, there are 77 Democrats who claim a Catholic identity, 71 of whom have a perfect pro-abortion record, and many of the newly elected members made supporting abortion a key part of their campaigns. Of the 57 Republicans who claim a Catholic identity, 37 have a perfect pro-life voting record; six have a mostly pro-life record; 12 newly elected members espouse a pro-life record; and one, a former Democrat, has a pro-abortion record.

This means that 95% of the Catholic House Democrats are pro-abortion and 98% of the Catholic House Republicans are pro-life (it remains to be seen whether the new Republican Representative from New Jersey, Jeff Van Drew, will flip on abortion and become pro-life).

In the Senate, there are 14 Catholic Democrats, 11 of whom have a perfect pro-abortion record (two have a perfect pro-life record). Of the 11 Catholic Republicans, 9 have a perfect

pro-life record; one is more pro-life than pro-abortion; and one is pro-abortion.

This means that 79% of Catholic Senate Democrats are pro-abortion and 91% of Catholic Senate Republicans are pro-life.

It would be hard for Democrats to become more pro-abortion than they already are, and it would be equally hard for Republicans to improve their pro-life record. The evidence is indisputable.

Does this mean that Catholic Republicans are better Catholics than Catholic Democrats? On the issue that the bishops regard as the “preeminent” issue of our time, namely, abortion, it certainly does. It must be said, however, that as a true measure of one’s Catholic status, one’s voting record on one issue is not necessarily dispositive.

Some argue that a congressman’s record on social justice issues is a more accurate gauge of his Catholicity. The problem with that contention is that it is much more difficult to make comparisons on such matters. To wit: Catholics who favor more government welfare programs contend that their position is better aligned with Church teachings, yet Catholics who oppose more government dependency maintain that they are more faithful to the Church’s teachings on the poor. Climate change is another issue that is difficult to score.

Ultimately, whether one is a “good Catholic” depends on factors of a more intimate nature. But it is not wrong to suggest that elected Catholic officials who maintain a decidedly pro-abortion voting record are an embarrassment to Catholics. They most certainly are. After all, the right to life is the most foundational of our natural rights. This is not an observation—it is a fact of life.