

MEET THE CATHOLICS IN THE NEW CONGRESS

Catholics comprise 28% of the seats in the 118th Congress, the largest of any religious affiliation. 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.

There are 65 Democrats who claim a Catholic identity in the House of Representatives, 54 of whom have a perfect pro-abortion record; and all 10 of the newly elected members are in the pro-abortion camp. Of the 56 Republicans who claim a Catholic identity, 48 have a perfect pro-life voting record; one has a mostly pro-life record; and the seven newly elected members espouse a pro-life position.

This means that 98% of the Catholic House Democrats are pro-abortion and 100% of the Catholic House Republicans are mostly pro-life.

In the Senate, there are 15 Catholic Democrats, 12 of whom have a perfect pro-abortion record. Of the 11 Catholic Republicans, 7 have a perfect pro-life record.

This means that 80% of Catholic Senate Democrats are pro-abortion and 100% of Catholic Senate Republicans are pro-life.

In the last two years, both parties have become more entrenched in their positions. Even people known to be more moderate on this issue ventured closer to their party's

extreme. For instance, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine moved more to the pro-life camp. However, moving in the opposite direction was Joe Manchin of West Virginia: he had a perfect pro-life rating in the 116th Congress but dropped down to a 67% score in the last congress.

Similarly in the House, Jeff Van Drew (R-NJ) became more pro-life after leaving the Democratic party. Henry Cuellar (D-TX), who was widely seen as the last pro-life Democrat in the House, earned a higher score from NARAL and a lower score from National Right to Life.

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.