



Abortion foes split over ballot - Michigan constitutional amendment would say life begins at conception. [2006]

Detroit News, The (MI) - May 30, 2006

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- **Section:** Front
- **Page:** 01A

[Edited, excerpts, emphasis added, all text with brackets [] added]

A controversial petition drive to place on the November ballot a constitutional amendment declaring that life begins at conception has divided Michigan's historically strong anti-abortion movement.

The proposal is backed by a band of abortion opponents, religious activists and the Michigan Republican Party, which endorsed it last month.

But ... **[the Michigan chapter of National Right to Life] and the Michigan [Roman] Catholic Conference -- are officially sitting this one out. And some say the two are working against it, behind the scenes.**

The clash has led to public sniping, the withdrawal of a U.S. Senate candidate endorsement and a dispute over which group is really staying true to its mission.

"It's never healthy for the movement when pro-life groups divide over anything," said Judie Brown, president of American Life League, a national anti-abortion organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. Brown supports the Michigan ballot issue.

Organizers must collect the signatures of 317,757 registered voters by July 10 to get the proposal on Michigan's Nov. 7 ballot. Leaders of the effort say they've sent out 250,000 petitions, and they're confident they'll reach the goal.

If the issue goes on the ballot, voters will be asked to give equal protection rights to the unborn. Its passage would be seen as a challenge to the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court that legalized abortion.

The addition of two conservative justices to the high court has raised abortion foes' hopes of a reversal.

In 2004, the last year for which statistics are available, 26,269 abortions were performed in Michigan.

Citizens for Life, backers of the constitutional amendment, say passing a law that eliminates abortion is at the heart of the anti-abortion movement.

[The Michigan chapter of National Right to Life] criticized

They say they're stunned that **[the Michigan chapter of National Right to Life] is not supporting the measure** and claim the organization has compromised its mission in an effort to bolster its position as a key political player.

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Voters appear to be siding with the backers. A poll taken by EPIC/MRA earlier this month showed the proposal leading, 47 percent to 42 percent.

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... Richard Alberta, senior pastor of the Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Brighton, ... "Christians have to be smart and wise when they make their decisions, so one can argue that tactically this might be getting out ahead of the political curve. **But there's a prophetic role that God's people have to play and in that sense it's always the right time to cry out for justice.**"

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Lack of support explained

Another mainstream abortion opponent [*sic*], **the Michigan [Roman] Catholic Conference, also is not backing the petition drive.** Paul Long, the conference's vice president for public policy, said the initiative here is not led by a broad-based coalition.

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The differences over this issue led to the withdrawal of an endorsement for Republican U.S. Senate candidate Jerry Zandstra of Cutlerville. **[The Michigan chapter of National Right to Life] initially gave Zandstra, a Christian Reformed minister, its blessing but then took it back after he publicly backed the petition drive and then criticized the state organization for not doing the same.** [Barbara] Listing [president of the Michigan chapter of National Right to Life] said it was the public chiding, rather than the support of the amendment, that prompted the change of heart.

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Cal Zastrow, founder of Citizens for Life, said **[the Michigan chapter of National Right to Life]** may come on board if the proposal reaches the ballot.

"We have hundreds of churches circulating petitions, and we're doing well," said Zastrow, of Kawkawlin, who describes himself as a missionary for the preborn. "I think Right to Life may be with us in the end."

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Petition language

"A proposal to amend the Michigan Constitution by adding new Sections 26 and 27 to Article 1 (or if Sections 26 and 27 of Article 1 already exist, then this proposal shall add new sections to Article 1 in the next available numeric order) to read as follows: **Section 26: 'The right to due process, whereby no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, guaranteed in Article 1, Section 17, and the right to equal protection of the law, guaranteed in Article 1, Section 2, vest at conception.'** **Section 27: 'A 'person', for purposes of the Constitution and laws of the State of Michigan, exists from the moment of conception.** This proposal is to be voted on at the November 7, 2006 Election."

- **Index terms:** ABORTION; MICHIGAN; CONSTITUTION; ELECTIONS
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