News



March for Life participants are seen in Washington in this 2014 file photo. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)

Julie Asher

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Neither snow nor sleet — nor partial government shutdown — will keep pro-lifers away from the nation's capital for the March for Life Jan. 18.

If it continues, the shutdown will be almost a month old by then. Daily news reports show the closures of monuments, memorials and the Smithsonian museums in Washington and trash cans overflowing on some federal property — images that might lead some folks around the country to think it is affecting big events planned for the nation's capital.

But not so.

"PLEASE NOTE: We plan to march even if the government shutdown is not yet resolved," declares the March for Life website, marchforlife.org. "We have marched for 45 years and will march again this year to end the human rights abuse of abortion."

Come to think of it, the start of what was a two-day historic blizzard that hit Washington in January 2016 had some impact on numbers, but marchers by the thousands still turned out that Jan. 22 to mark the anniversary of *Roe* v. *Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion virtually on demand.

"The shutdown really did not factor into our planning at all," said Patrick Ford of Belmont Abbey College in Belmont, North Carolina. Director of campus ministry and the Hintemeyer Catholic Leadership Program at the college, Ford is the point person for the school's pro-life contingent heading to the march.

"This year, especially, we have tried to make this trip more of a pilgrimage and less of a site-seeing event," he told Catholic News Service in an email Jan. 10. "The venues we will visit — the (St.) John Paul II National Shrine and the Basilica of the National Shrine (of the Immaculate Conception) — are not affected by local politics, so our trip should be entirely unaffected by the goings-on in Washington."

Ford added, "We look forward to another great March for Life with our hundreds of thousands of friends!"

The same goes for the 500-plus students coming in from Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. They'll be carrying a giant green banner and wearing winter hats especially designed for this year's march, said Dominique Cognetti, a junior majoring in social work.

The entire effort — from promoting the march in late September with fliers on campus to designing their gear for the march — is led by the students, Cognetti told CNS in a telephone interview Jan. 9.

"I don't think at this time it's going to affect anything," she said of the shutdown, recalling that Franciscan students came to Washington "when the whole storm" took place in 2016.

They're coming in eight buses. This year, like always, they will begin their trip on the eve of the march with a late night Holy Hour. They depart at midnight to arrive at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception about 6 a.m., in time for the 7:30 a.m. Mass that sends participants forth for the March for Life rally, with a lineup of speakers, on the National Mall.

After the rally, the march itself goes up Constitution Avenue and ends at the Supreme Court.

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This year's theme, “Unique From Day One: Pro-life Is Pro-science” focuses on how scientific advancements reveal "the humanity of the unborn child from the moment of conception."

Speakers will include three members of Congress — Sen. Steve Daines, R-Montana, and Reps. Dan Lipinski, D-Illinois and Chris Smith, R-New Jersey — and a Democratic member of the Louisiana Legislature, Rep. Katrina Jackson.

“We are delighted to have these four pro-life champions speak at the March for Life rally," said Jeanne Mancini, president of March for Life. "The right to life is a nonpartisan issue and, regardless of politics, we should all unite for life and stand against abortion, the greatest human rights abuse of our time."

Others who will address the rally include Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-life Activities; Supreme Knight Carl Anderson, CEO of the Knights of Columbus; Ben Shapiro, editor-in-chief of The Daily Wire; Abby Johnson, founder of And Then There Were None; Alveda King, Priests for Life's director of civil rights for the unborn; Dr. Kathi Aultman, fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; and Ally Cavazos, president of Princeton Pro-Life.

Attending the March for Life is something Cognetti has been doing since she was a freshman in high school, she told CNS.

When she was younger, she would accompany her parents to the march, and later got involved on her own. To see the "amount of people" gathered for life, "especially those in my generation, really touched me. ... We have thousands of people coming to D.C. to defend what they believe in and not just older people," she said.

The March for Life is a great way for her and everyone from Franciscan University "to stand together, to stand firm in what we believe in. We know life starts at conception."

The march is "very eye-opening," she added, and provides a chance for people who say they are pro-life to do something about it.

Cognetti added that she feels her generation is making "a name for ourselves and not sitting down any more and saying we're pro-life — we're taking action!"