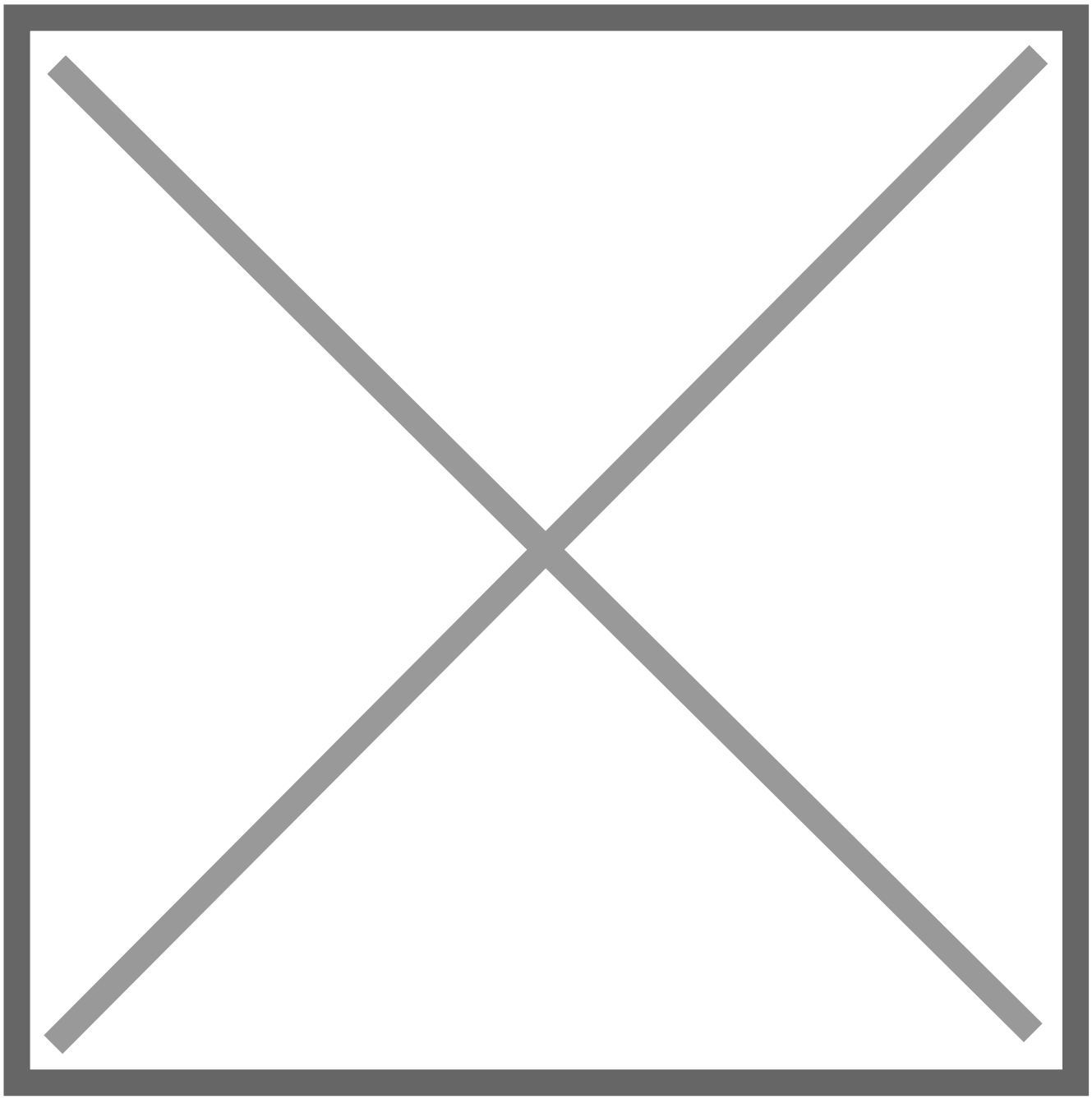
News



U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., is seen in Washington in this 2009 file photo. (CNS photo/Reuters/Mike Theiler)



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The Election Day defeat of Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minnesota, will shrink the number of pro-life Democrats in the House of Representatives by two when the 117th Congress is seated in January.

Another pro-life Democrat, Rep. Dan Lipinski, D-Illinois, lost to a primary challenger earlier this year.

"It's just tragic. I think his race and Dan Lipinski's show how hard it is to be a pro-life Democrat," said Kirsten Day, executive director of Democrats for Life of America, in a Nov. 4 telephone interview with Catholic News Service.

"We tried to help them as much as we could," Day added. For Peterson, "we did some postcards (saying) 'yes, he is pro-life,' because they were telling everybody he wasn't."

"They," according to Day, were Peterson's Republican opponent, former Minnesota Lt. Gov. Michelle Fischbach, and her allies.

The National Right to Life Committee, whose backing of Fischbach extended to the GOP primary campaign, lists Darla St. Martin, Fischbach's mother, as one of its co-executive directors. Minnesota Concerned Citizens for Life, which also endorsed Fischbach early in her campaign, is run by Fischbach's husband, Scott.

In a feature on women endorsed by NRLC running for Congress, the September issue of the National Right to Life News said Peterson, who had been endorsed by NRLC in every prior reelection bid, had "a mixed record" on abortion, but that "Fischbach will deliver 100% pro-life leadership."

Peterson, 77, outspent Fischbach, $16 million to $7 million, in his bid for a 16th term, but lost in a district in which Donald Trump beat Hillary Clinton by a 2-to-1 margin in 2016.

"National Right to Life should be ashamed of what they've done to the national pro-life Democratic movement. It's just shameful," Day said.

A Nov. 4 email from the Susan B. Anthony List, which promotes pro-life women candidates, took note of Fischbach's win along with those of other office-seekers, but did not comment directly on Peterson, saying only that Fischbach had "flipped (a) Democrat-held seat."

"We need voices. It's important to have pro-life voices in both parties," Day said. "The pro-life Republicans and the abortion lobby are working together, because neither of them want them (pro-life Democrats) in."

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Asked to clarify her remark, Day replied, "They don't work together, but they work together. They both have the same goal: They don't want any pro-life Democrats in Congress."

"Yes, pro-life Republicans will work to defeat pro-life Democrats. But the Democratic Party seeks to defeat pro-life Democrats," said National Right to Life Committee executive director David O'Steen in a Nov. 5 telephone interview with CNS, citing Lipinski's primary defeat at the hands of Marie Newman, who supports abortion rights. She also won Nov. 3 in the general election.

"I cannot think of one (congressional race) in the last 20 years, that pitted a pro-abortion Republican against a pro-life Democrat," added O'Steen, who praised Fischbach's "20-year, 100% pro-life voting record in the Minnesota Senate."

By Day's count, there are just two reliable pro-life Democrats left in the House: Henry Cuellar of Texas and Ben McAdams of Utah. A pair of Pennsylvania representatives, Conor Lamb and Brendan Boyle, entered Congress as pro-life Dems, but Lamb "hasn't voted that way, so we want to talk to him," she said. "We endorsed (Boyle) when he was in the state house. When he went to Congress, it just seemed like he had to support the abortion lobby and its agenda."

In the presidential election, "there were a lot of pro-life voters who pulled the lever for Trump because they couldn't stomach Joe Biden," a Catholic who supports legal abortion, Day said.

The task now is to "look at where Democrats won and where Democrats lost, and where we can pick up seats — because we basically abandoned Middle America."

Democrats for Life of America's count of state races where endorsed candidates won, while seemingly meager, kept growing — from 75 Nov. 4 to 81 by Nov. 5.

"We just kicked off this 'Run Pro-Life' campaign," Day said, "setting up an infrastructure of support for those pro-life Democrats to run" and "making sure they know they're not the only ones."

Another task is to find a pro-life Democrat to run for the party's presidential nomination in 2024, assuming that Biden, should he win this election, serves for just one term.

But at one point in Congress, Day lamented, "we used to have 125 pro-life Democrats," and abortion was not a wedge issue between the two parties.