News



Republican presidential candidate and former U.S. President Donald Trump speaks during a rally in Reno, Nevada, Dec. 17, 2023. (OSV News/Reuters/Carlos Barria)



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The right-wing lobbying organization CatholicVote.org has endorsed former President Donald Trump in the Republican presidential primary.

The announcement came the day before the New Hampshire primary and one day after Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis suspended his campaign, leaving Trump and former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley as the contenders in the GOP race.

The choice, according to CatholicVote President Brian Burch, is a "no-brainer."

"I know many Catholics are divided over whether Trump is the best candidate to defeat Biden. But that's also what primaries are for," Burch said.

Earlier in the primary, the organization had seemingly supported DeSantis, hosting an October rally for him at Ave Maria University in October. Burch is pictured at that rally on the cover of CatholicVote's 2022 annual report.

In announcing the Trump endorsement, Burch attacked President Joe Biden and cited Trump's appointment of three of the six U.S. Supreme Court justices who overturned *Roe* v. *Wade*.

"We need a general to lead us," Burch said. "Someone who knows the truth and is willing to fight for it — not simply someone who will calculate the path of least resistance to accomplish some good on the margins."

In 2016, Burch joined other conservative Catholics in signing a manifesto against Trump, arguing he was "manifestly unfit to be president of the United States." CatholicVote did not endorse Trump in that campaign, saying he remained "problematic in too many ways to receive our endorsement."

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By 2020, the group was explicit in its support for Trump, with its voter guide checking the box next to his name. As NCR reported that year, the organization also used geofencing technology to capture cellphone data from Massgoers in key battleground states, using it to send political ads hoping to tip the election in favor of Trump.

In this year's endorsement, Burch emphasized, "Trump is not merely our reluctant choice."

Although most religious nonprofits cannot endorse political candidates, CatholicVote's 501(c)(4) status allows it to engage in political campaigns, including making endorsements.

The organization traces its history to the now-defunct Catholic Alliance, which was an outgrowth of the Christian Coalition in 1995. On its website, CatholicVote describes itself as "a community of patriotic Americans who believe that the timeless truths of the Catholic faith are good for America. That's why we make it our mission to inspire every Catholic in America to live out the truths of our faith in public life."

CatholicVote.org is a project of the Madison, Wisconsin-based Fidelis Center for Law and Policy, which Burch founded in 2005 to support "education and legal advocacy programs to defend life, faith, and family." Its most recent tax filings show $3.34 million in annual revenue and Burch drawing $227,000 in compensation from related organizations.

CatholicVote's daily newsletter reaches 350,000 daily subscribers. In the past year, it has launched a podcast and a Spanish-language project.

In a speech Monday in New Hampshire, Trump thanked CatholicVote for the endorsement.

"I don't know what it is with Catholics but the FBI is going after Catholics," Trump said, referring to a 2023 leaked FBI memo that included "radical-traditionalist Catholics" among extremists targeted by the bureau.

"Why would any Catholic vote for a Democrat?" Trump said. "Think of it, what they're doing, I hear stories that are just horrible. Why would a Catholic be voting for Biden or a Democrat? Doesn't make sense, it's horrible — what they're doing is horrible."

FBI Director Christopher Wray, testifying to the Senate Judiciary Committee in December, reiterated that the memo was quickly withdrawn once discovered. He denied that the FBI was targeting Catholics, asserting the bureau does "not and will not conduct investigations based on anybody's exercise of their constitutionally protected religious expression."