

A restaurant in D.C. barred a pro-life group; here's why that shouldn't shock or offend us

You'd think they'd be OK. Demanding action on climate change, speaking against systemic racism, advocating expanded health care, rejecting the death penalty, upholding universal human rights – they're Democratic down the line.

Except for this one thing. One deviation that apparently means everything to mainstream liberals. Members of Democrats for Life (DFL) insist the traditional liberal concern for the marginalized and vulnerable be extended to the unborn. They believe unborn human beings must be included in the Democratic pursuit of equality for all.

DFL is part of the whole-life or consistent-life movement, focusing more than most other groups on political action. Among their better-known board members are Catherine Glenn Foster, who runs Americans United for Life, Louisiana state senator Katrina Jackson and former Pennsylvania congresswoman Kathy Dahlkemper. Former Illinois congressman Dan Lipinski is a fellow traveler.

They describe their mission as working “to defend universal human rights within the Democratic Party and to elect whole-life Democrats. We seek to end the influence of systems of pervasive injustice, particularly the mass lethal injustice of abortion, and other human rights abuses, and to build a life-affirming culture within our party, in our communities and in our nation.”

In October, the Washington, D.C., restaurant Busboys & Poets – one of the cool places, as the name suggests – accepted a

reservation from DFL for their annual breakfast held on the morning of the March for Life. The restaurant then cancelled it just 10 days before the March, when they found out the group was pro-life. I would have thought the name would have tipped them off back in October, but apparently not.

It's a hip restaurant, whose owners could be expected to be pro-choice. As I wrote for The New Oxford Review, it features a book section full of lefty analyses and trendy self-help, couches as well as tables, organic locally grown food, a beer list full of local craft beers and cool, chatty waiters. I can't see the connection between pro-choice beliefs and organic food and local craft beer, but the second usually implies the first. Throw in honoring Howard Zinn and the connection's almost inevitable.

But still, it's a public restaurant that rents its space to all and sundry. But not to DFL, whose executive director, Kristen Day, explained the exclusion. They told her they hosted events for Planned Parenthood. "I did try to explain to her our whole-life mission, our support for paid leave, our opposition to the death penalty and our belief that we must address the root causes of abortion and provide women with real choice. But she could not get over the fact that we oppose abortion."

The chain's spokeswoman said the restaurant "stands firmly on the belief that women have the right to make their own reproductive health decisions." Busboys & Poets welcomes people talking about issues, but "we are also a safe space. As such, we cannot knowingly accept events designed to fund an agenda which our community members believe to be trampling on the rights of others."

One could point to the hypocrisy of free-speech liberals refusing to facilitate free speech, especially when doing so (hosting breakfasts) is a regular part of their business. Our first reaction to stories like this is some version of "That's

not fair.” But it is. That’s the problem.

We – pro-lifers in this case, but Catholics in general – must expect this kind of thing. More and more of it. Not because pro-choicers act unfairly, but because they understand the matter differently than we do.

We share the same basic principle of enabling others’ speech. We generally do that, because a pluralistic society needs open discussion. But not completely open. Everyone limits free speech on moral grounds. Busboys & Poets shouldn’t host pro-life groups, given what they believe about abortion.

Catholics work by the same principle the chain does. Catholics widely condemned Loyola Marymount University’s giving its facilities to a group promoting Planned Parenthood. Catholics generally support bakers and florists who can’t make things celebrating same-sex marriage.

As much as I admire her work (I’m a member of DFL), I wouldn’t say what Kristen Day does. “We as Americans want a country that’s rooted in inclusivity and diversity,” she said. “Inclusivity and diversity cannot be achieved if we shun and shut out individuals or groups because of political backgrounds, beliefs and ideals.”

Yes, but only partly yes. Inclusivity and diversity have their limits. Everyone shuts out people they believe hold immoral beliefs and ideals. We’d cheer the restaurant if it canceled a breakfast being held by a white supremacist group, because we all recognize racism as evil.

For many people today, opposition to abortion is of the same moral order, the same level of offense, as opposition to racial equality. They believe defending unborn life is as bad as defending racial segregation. They believe that the laws we want would hurt women, badly, by taking from them a right that is theirs.

Busboys & Poets is right, given their understanding, to do what they did. I don't see what else they could do. We would do the same thing in reverse, because, for us, approval of abortion is of the same moral order, the same level of offense, as approval of racial discrimination.

That's the world in which we now must work. We're not just marginalized, the way a dissident minority will be. We're banned, as people who support something bad. By people operating, as we wish them to do, on their principles.

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