

Kansas pro-lifers will 'redouble efforts' to help women, protect unborn

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (CNS) – Now that the Value Them Both constitutional amendment has been defeated, a big question looms: What's next?

"This turns our attention to our pastoral efforts," said Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City. "While we can't protect women and children from abortion by the law, we can with love."

"This makes the work of our pregnancy resource centers more important. We need to redouble our efforts in those areas," he said. "I and the church are certainly committed to doing that. And our post-abortion ministry becomes even more important."

The church will have its work cut out for it.

"Clearly, Kansas is going to grow now as an abortion destination state for the Midwest," said Chuck Weber, executive director of the Kansas Catholic Conference.

"We, as a church, have to step forward with resources and alternatives, like pregnancy resource centers and post-abortive services, to offer these women who are being preyed upon by the abortion industry an alternative," he said.

The Value Them Both amendment would have reversed the 2019 Kansas Supreme Court decision that found a right to unlimited and unrestricted abortion in the state's 1859 constitution.

The state's high court ruling in *Hodes & Nauser v. Schmidt* has effectively nullified more than 20 years of pro-life legislation by making abortion a fundamental right, placing all abortion-regulating laws under a stricter standard of

scrutiny.

Because of the Hodes ruling, laws banning the live dismemberment of unborn children, as well as laws requiring clinic licensing and inspections, have been struck down. More laws are expected to fall as they are challenged.

Pro-life activists are “deeply saddened” by the loss, but grateful, too.

“We are profoundly grateful for the countless prayers, volunteer hours and sacrifices that so many across the entire state gave to Value Them Both,” said Debra Niesen, archdiocesan lead consultant for pro-life ministries.

“We are so proud of everyone who courageously and joyfully advocated for this very noble and important cause – the defense of preborn children and vulnerable women facing an unplanned or challenging pregnancy,” she said.

Fifty-nine percent of Kansans, or 534,134, voted against the amendment, while 41%, or 374,611, voted in favor of it.

Anti-amendment forces won the special election Aug. 2, which also was a primary, through an effective campaign of fear and misinformation, said Archbishop Naumann.

“I think we’re in a great cultural struggle right now,” he said. “Fifty years of legalized abortion in this country has conditioned people to think that there is a right to abortion. What is the right they’re talking about? The right to kill our own children.”

This vote does not mean the state has changed, said Niesen.

“We do not believe that Kansas has become a pro-abortion state, but we were not able to overcome the millions in out-of-state money that the abortion industry spent,” she told The Leaven, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Kansas City.

“Sadly, I believe that the majority of Kansans who voted ‘no’ did not fully understand the amendment as a result,” she said.

Archbishop Naumann said that “The abortion industry and its supporters were able to concentrate a tremendous amount of resources in Kansas.”

Millions in largely out-of-state cash powered the “no” vote.

“More than 70% of the money spent on their campaign came from outside of Kansas,” the archbishop said. “Additionally, their campaign was a campaign of misinformation and scaring people with arguments that were absurd.”

The secular media help spread misinformation by reporting the amendment would restrict medical care for ectopic pregnancies and miscarriages and by calling it an abortion “ban.”

Anti-amendment forces also claimed there was no need for Value Them Both because Kansas has strong laws regulating abortion.

“They would tout all the limits that the abortion industry fought against in the Legislature,” said Jeanne Gawdun, director of government relations for Kansans for Life.

“They continued to cite these limits, never once saying those limits are now presumed unconstitutional and will be struck down by abortion industry lawsuits,” she said. “And the mainstream media was a willing accomplice to spreading this misinformation.”

The U.S. Supreme Court’s reversal of the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision in its June 24 ruling of Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization contributed to a very strong turnout compared with past primary elections.

“I think it obviously motivated people on both sides of the issue to come out,” said Archbishop Naumann. “Again, I’d go back to the campaign the other side ran, which was to frighten and scare people.

“So, the big turnout in this election was the unaffiliated. A lot of those unaffiliated, from what I could see, voted ‘no’ on the amendment. ... It brought out a lot of voters that normally wouldn’t come out in a primary.”

The timing of the Dobbs ruling, coming so close to the election, fueled not only turnout but also confusion.

“That ruling created a period of confusion in our culture,” said Weber. “I think Americans are still trying to wrap their heads around what the overturning of Roe v. Wade means.”

“The abortion industry successfully created an environment of hysteria,” he said, “that fed into their narrative that somehow women would not get proper health care if we passed the Value Them Both amendment.”

Gawdun said that many of the younger generation have been brought up knowing about live dismemberment abortion, but “the ones in their late 20s have grown up with this as a so-called right. They were told Value Them Both would take away their right, and it’s not a right.”

Archbishop Naumann frequently stressed the campaign to pass the amendment was an effort to uphold human, rather than religious, rights. And that the Catholic Church had a rightful place in that fight.

“Religious faith ... helps people see the moral implications of these human rights issues,” he said. “Historically – whether it was slavery or civil rights – (people of faith) have always led the way on human rights causes. But this is what it is, a human rights cause. It doesn’t take religious faith to know that it’s wrong to kill a child.”

As the church faces the post-election realities, all efforts must draw strength from spiritual sources, said Archbishop Naumann.

“The foundation of everything we do is prayer,” he said. “The election results drive us to our knees to pray for guidance from the Lord and the Holy Spirit as how we go about building this culture of life and civilization of love, where every life will be respected and cherished – the unborn child and the mother as well.”

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