

Three Days Never to be Forgotten

BY Dave Andrusko

"Your world was shaped in the first 24 hours after conception. ... Just five years ago, this statement would have been heresy. Mammalian embryos were thought to spend their first few days as a featureless orb of cells."

From "Your Destiny, from Day One," *Science*, July 4, 2002

"These days, somebody taking a good hard look at partial-birth abortion, or contemplating the prospect of using embryos to create body parts, can scarcely escape the feeling that we're no longer looking down that slippery slope but up. Yes, we've come a long way since *Roe v. Wade*. A long way down."

Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial page editor Paul Greenberg, speaking at NRLC 2006

"What this means is that 83% of those surveyed want some kind of restriction on the unfettered access to abortion."

Pollster and author Kellyanne Conway, also speaking at NRLC 2006

I am an avid sports fan and a multi-tasker's multi-tasker. Even as I am writing this editorial, I am sneaking a peak at my favorite baseball team whose games I can watch in real time on my computer.

Spending as much time as I do in the stands or glued to my computer screen, I know that sports reporters are almost as prone to clichés as are the unimaginative reporters who cover the world of politics. But there is one generalization that actually holds true in almost all cases: "Energy" goes a long way toward explaining why one athletic performance surpasses another.

But that insight isn't confined to sports. It also applies to most other endeavors. That's why 15 minutes into the opening session of the 2006 NRL Convention I knew in my heart this was going to be a three-day gathering to remember.

Whatever are the almost mystical ingredients that explain that overused but accurate idiom "chemistry," they were there in abundance beginning at 10:00 am, June 22, at the Sheraton Music City Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee. Whatever it was—buzz, enthusiasm, buoyancy, oomph, passion—it unmistakably filled the air as pollster and author Kellyanne Conway addressed the audience at the opening general session.

Conway is CEO and president of The Polling Company and one of the sharpest pollsters around. Her work is painstakingly thorough. In that vein, as she pointed out more than once to the audience, a useless poll is worse than a biased poll.

By that she meant polls which ask questions that lead you nowhere, such as "Are you pro-life or pro-choice?" or "Should *Roe v. Wade* be overturned?" Much better are questions that ask specifics, such as "What most closely describes your position on abortion?" followed by a number of options which tease out people's real feelings.

For example, last April The Polling Company offered respondents six choices: Abortion should be

- never legal (16%)

- legal only when mother's life is in danger (16%)
- legal if mother's life at risk plus cases of rape and incest (22%)
- legal for any reason during first 3 months only (21%)
- legal through 6 months (8%)
- legal any time, any reason (12%)

To summarize, 54% of respondents would restrict abortion to the 1.5% of "hard cases," and only 12% favor the abortion regime established by Roe and Planned Parenthood v. Casey. That's why we know that polls which report that 66% of Americans don't want Roe overturned show only that most Americans clearly don't know that Roe opened a floodgate.

People had come to the convention, as they always do, to be educated, to be informed, to be inspired. There was a common thread to all the dozens of workshops I attended right up to the very last session my wife and I went to—"Surviving Unplanned Pregnancies."

Of the 25 conventions I've attended, I've never been around a group of pro-lifers who were more knowledgeable or more able to take what the speakers offered and (as we say in sports) take it to the next level. Extremely sharp, incisive questions were the order of the day along with very thoughtful comments.

Clearly, the audiences were determined to be able to put the insights and recommendations and strategies to good use. There was a level of sophistication that was unparalleled.

The enthusiasm that jump-started NRLC 2006 Thursday morning carried over through 70 workshops, three more general sessions, a prayer breakfast, and the closing banquet. I believe it is fair to say that there has never been an assemblage finer than the headliners who spoke at the convention.

In addition to Mrs. Conway, there were Jennifer O'Neill, Bobby Schindler and Suzanne Schindler Vitadamo, Fred Barnes, Dr. Benny Chayen, Ramesh Ponnuru, Erin Brady Worsham, and Paul Greenberg. Authors and Pulitzer Prizewinners and physicians and artists and disability rights activists and pollsters—what a collection of speakers!

The only way to properly get a feel for the convention is to purchase the tapes. (If you go to page 22, you will find information how to order.) Let me conclude with just a couple of highlights from the many I could select.

The Schindler family, as many of you know, is determined that others do not suffer the dreadful fate Terri faced. Their Terri Schindler Schiavo Foundation is a clearinghouse of information about battling withdrawal of care and a growing source of physicians and lawyers willing to go head to head with those who worship at the throne of the "quality of life" ethos. (See the story on page five.)

Author and journalist Fred Barnes knew which key to use to unlock our interest at 8:00 Friday morning. He talked about five pro-lifers who weren't always pro-life. That distinguished list included the likes of Ronald Reagan, Henry Hyde, Ramesh Ponnuru (author of *The Party of Death*), bioethicist Wesley Smith, and Barnes himself.

The similarities are very helpful as we continue to explore ways to increase the size of our growing Movement. Barnes reminded the audience that people don't want to think about abortion, a reluctance reinforced by elites who are not pro-life.

But when people are seriously confronted with the issue—whether it be a "moderate" piece of legislation that resulted in abortion on demand, finding materials from pro-suicide groups in the home of a friend who'd taken her own life that make killing oneself sound like a leisurely

stroll, or just attending a meeting of pro-lifers who are nothing like the clichéd stereotypes you had read, or listening to a debate where the lust for death is unveiled in all its ugliness—your conscience tells you it's wrong.

And the convention was capped off by the Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial page editor of the Arkansas Democrat Gazette. Ironically, Paul Greenberg also once was "pro-choice."

Like so many at the time, Greenberg saw Roe v. Wade as not all that big a deal. He told the audience he was politely confronted by a young Baptist minister who challenged him to debate Roe in a series of pro and con pieces on the pages of the Pine Bluff Commercial newspaper. His conversion was not instantaneous, but it was profound. Much of the credit goes to that young preacher, Mike Huckabee, who went on to become the current governor of Arkansas. (See the column that begins on the back cover.)

But as wonderful as the general session speakers unquestionably were, I would be doing my readers a huge disservice if I did not emphasize one more time how important it is to get all the tapes of the workshops. My first convention was in Omaha in 1981 and I remain as overwhelmed today by the power of the pro-life witness as I was 25 years ago.

You must listen to the wonderful testimony to the surge of pro-life outreach among African-Americans. Or the several sessions that document the welcomed coming together of a real outreach to men who've gone through an abortion experience. Or the marvelous three-session track that covers stem cell research and cloning from A to Z. Or the session that outlined the basics of fetal development. Or the many practical sessions that will equip you to power up your local chapter.

I cannot adequately express how wonderful NRLC 2006 was. They were three days I will never forget.

But I can encourage you to begin to make plans now for NRLC 2007, which will take place June 14-16 in Kansas City. Don't miss it!