



SUSAN B. ANTHONY
PRO-LIFE
AMERICA

TO: Pro-Life Movement Leaders
FR: SBA President Marjorie Dannenfelser
RE: Where the GOP Field Stands on National Protections
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Looking for a National Defender of Life in the First Debate

The first GOP presidential debate will take place tomorrow in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on Fox News. While political insiders and the media have been tracking the presidential race on an hourly basis for months, millions of Americans will be paying attention to the race for the first time. Back in 2015, 24 million Americans tuned in to the very first GOP presidential debate and it got an avalanche of media coverage.

Abortion is sure to be a hot topic as this is the first presidential primary following the Supreme Court's decision to hand the issue back to the people to decide through their elected representatives in Congress and in the states. For the first time since 1973, the president – working with Congress – can enact meaningful protections to save unborn children with the Supreme Court's chokehold on abortion politics finally gone. The people finally get their say.

In this new era, pro-life voters deserve to know who is willing to champion the unborn child and mothers in the Oval Office and work tirelessly to enact national protections on their behalf.

The need for national leadership for national protections is urgent when you look at the political landscape. A year after *Dobbs*, 25 states – half the country – have put pro-life protections into law that were impermissible under *Roe* (six of these state laws are under judicial review). There are just a handful of states left where we have a chance at enacting pro-life protections over the next couple of years depending on the outcome of state legislative and/or gubernatorial races. The remaining states will continue to have few to no protections for the unborn absent radical political change. These states account for nearly 2/3 of the nation's abortions that were occurring under *Roe* – over 600,000 annually. The only possible way to save any of these children is through federal protections.

National protections for the unborn are not unprecedented. Even under the *Roe* regime, Congress passed and President Bush signed into law a nationwide prohibition on partial-birth abortions. This was accomplished because it was prioritized by pro-life lawmakers and the movement, and Democrat opposition caved under the weight of pro-life political pressure. Further, even under *Roe*, both houses of Congress under GOP control voted multiple times on national protections when the unborn child can feel pain.

Some point to the difficulty of enacting national protections for the unborn given that Congress is deadlocked on just about every issue. It is not an excuse. This is exactly where presidential leadership comes in to break logjams, advocate nationally, and demand action from Congress –

especially when polling consistently shows there is a strong national consensus already formed to stop painful late-term abortions.

Many – even in our movement – said it was impossible to overturn *Roe*. The impossible happened because of presidential leadership that was held accountable by our very movement.

During the first GOP presidential debate, every candidate should be asked what specific national protections for the unborn and their mothers they will advocate. It is critical headed into 2024 that we have a pro-life presidential nominee who is strong in their convictions, can articulate a clear plan for the unborn, and is willing to contrast that position with the extremism of Joe Biden’s position of abortion without any limits.

Where the Candidates Stand on National Protections

Below is a summary of where each GOP presidential candidate currently stands on national protections, including direct quotes. Some have taken strong stances, while others are weak. SBA Pro-Life America sees our role in the primary as strengthening the pro-life commitments of every candidate. It is still early in the primary, and it is our hope that every candidate will be challenged by the pro-life movement to rise to the occasion.

Note: Candidates are listed in order of national polling average from Real Clear Politics.

1. **Donald Trump:** President Trump has committed to advocating national protections, but not yet specified what he’d advocate. In a May 2023 speech at Faith & Freedom, President Trump [said](#): “There of course remains a vital role for the federal government in protecting unborn life,” and: “We will defeat the radical Democrat policy of extreme late-term abortion.” In a May 2023 CNN town hall, President Trump when pressed [said](#) he’d “negotiate so people are happy,” noting “Some people are at six weeks, some people are at three weeks, two weeks... President Trump is going to make a determination what he thinks is great for the country.”
2. **Ron DeSantis:** Governor DeSantis has recognized that there is a legitimate interest for Congress to pass national protections, but he’s expressed a lack of will to advocate these protections and said that as president he would encourage the states to act. In a July 2023 interview with Megyn Kelly, Governor DeSantis [said](#): “I’ll be a pro-life president... We are running on doing things I know I can accomplish... I’m going to be a leader with the bully pulpit to help local communities and states advance the cause of life. But I really believe right now in our society it’s really a bottom-up movement and that’s where we’ve had most success – Iowa, South Carolina, Florida – and I think you’re going to continue to see a lot of good battles there.” Asked in follow-up if he does not support a federal law, the governor said: “I think there is a federal interest, but I think the reality is that the country is divided on it, you’re not going to see Wisconsin mimic what Texas has, you’re not going to see Pennsylvania mimic what Georgia has. We’re divided. I mean, I haven’t seen Congress move that. I don’t have much confidence that Congress is going to do anything meaningful in this regard, so in a federalist system you have differences of

opinion, and that stuff gets filtered out, but clearly, right now, you're going to see different states go in different directions and I understand that.”

3. **Vivek Ramaswamy:** Ramaswamy is ardently opposed to national pro-life protections. In an interview with the “All In” podcast in July 2023, he [said](#): “I would not support a federal abortion ban of any kind on principled ground,” also noting he is “open to persuasion” if a constitutional scholar can convince him otherwise.
4. **Mike Pence:** Vice President Pence has boldly and consistently advocated national protections for the unborn and has challenged the presidential field to support a national minimum standard when the unborn child can feel pain at 15 weeks. In a June 2023 interview on Fox News, Vice President Pence [said](#): “I think it is a winning issue...I did, this week, call on every other candidate for the Republican nomination to support a minimum standard of a 15 week ban on abortion at the national level. That would align American law with most of the countries in Europe that literally ban abortion after 12 to 15 weeks. Our laws at the national level today are more aligned with North Korea, China, and Iran than with other Western countries in Europe.”
5. **Nikki Haley:** Ambassador Haley has recognized that there is a federal role in protecting unborn children but has consistently said that passing a national limit is unrealistic and unachievable – and has also refused to say what limit she would support/advocate (putting aside the question of achievability). She has said we should try to find consensus around stopping late-term abortions, even though poll after poll demonstrates that consensus already exists. In a May 2023 interview with Face the Nation, Ambassador Haley [said](#): “For a national standard, I think we have to tell the American people the truth. In order to do a national standard, you'd have to have a majority of the House, 60 Senate votes, and a president. We haven't had 60 pro-life senators in 100 years. So the idea that a Republican president could ban all abortions is not being honest with the American people, any more than a Democrat president could ban these pro-life laws in the states.”
6. **Tim Scott:** Senator Scott has been a strong supporter and advocate of a national minimum standard to protect babies who can feel pain at 15 weeks. In a July 2023 town hall with WMUR in New Hampshire, Senator Scott was asked if abortion is a states’ issue. Senator Scott [responded](#): “The radical left has decided to continue the federal push for abortion on demand until up until the moment of birth...As your president, I would encourage and fight for a 15-week limit of abortion in our country. I believe that life has intrinsic value, without any question. I am a 100% pro-life conservative with a 100% pro-life voting record. I believe a 15-week limit is where the federal government should stop the radical left from pushing abortion up until the day of birth.”
7. **Chris Christie:** Governor Christie is ardently opposed to national pro-life protections, saying that the federal government should only act if a consensus emerges. In a June

2023 town hall with CNN's Anderson Cooper, he [said](#): "What I stand for, Anderson, is what conservatives have been arguing for 50 years, which is that *Roe* was wrong, there's no federal constitutional right to an abortion and that the states should decide. And I absolutely believe that each state should make their decision on this. The federal government should not be involved unless and until there's a consensus around the country from the 50 states making their own decisions about what it should be. And if at that time, there's a consensus that has emerged, well then, that's fine."

8. **Asa Hutchinson:** Governor Hutchinson has been a supporter of national protections for the unborn. Appearing on Fox News Sunday in April 2023, Governor Hutchinson was asked by Shannon Bream if he would support a 15-week minimum standard when the child can feel pain. Hutchinson [said](#): "The answer is I've always signed pro-life bills. And a pro-life bill that comes to me that sets reasonable restrictions, but also has the appropriate exceptions, yes I would sign it."
9. **Doug Burgum:** Governor Burgum has strongly opposed national protections for the unborn. In a June 2023 interview with Forbes, Governor Burgum [said](#): "No, I would not sign a federal abortion ban, I believe this is left to the states."
10. **Will Hurd:** Former Congressman Hurd opposes national protections. In a July 2023 interview with WMUR, he [said](#): "As an elected official, you talk about this issue, but we need to make sure this is a state issue, so the states can clarify."
11. **Francis Suarez:** Mayor Suarez has been a strong supporter of national protections for the unborn. In a June 2023 interview with the AP, Suarez [said](#): "We are in a situation where 70% of the country agrees with a limitation of 15 weeks where there is an exception for the life of the mother and an exception for rape and incest, and I think that is a position that will save a tremendous amount of babies. If there was that kind of federal law, that's one that I would support as president."