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“They abruptly left 30 of us in the hallway”

Pro-lifers get frosty reception from some legislators during Capitol Day for Life lobbying sessions

News from the Trenches

The first ever “Capitol Day for Life,” held on Wednesday, June 18, brought close to 250 pro-lifers to the state capitol in Sacramento to lobby legislators to cut abortion funding from California’s budget.

Wynette Sills, the event’s coordinator, said she was pleased by the turnout. “For a weekday event in 97 degree temperatures, I think it was a healthy show of support,” she said. “More pro-life legislators came to speak in support at our rally than we had anticipated. And we had plenty of people to visit all the offices.”

One leader who helped coordinate the event reported that, although the turnout wasn’t as big as they had hoped for, the impact was immeasurable. Carol Marie Seidenburg, a web site designer and publisher for the Coalition for Women and Children, said she was thrilled to be part of the event. “This is really the right time in this current budget to stop the use of \$32 million to publicly fund a private decision,” she said.

Seidenburg, who also handled registration for event, said she was surprised at how many people were in Room 447 of the capitol building when she arrived. “About 60 people had pre-registered for the lobby training and orientation,” she said. “It was a pleasure to see such a well-attended group for the morning planning session.”

After the rally, Seidenburg joined one of several small groups of four or five people, each group assigned to lobby a specific set of legislators. Seidenburg, who describes herself as a “convert” from the pro-choice position, volunteered to visit staff members of three legislators she described as “the most pro-choice women in the state legislature.”

Other members of Seidenburg’s group included a woman who changed her mind about abortion after enduring post-abortion trauma, and a forensic pathologist who has seen thousands of dead babies in the course of her career, which caused her to change her mind and become pro-life.

The first legislator Seidenburg’s group tried to meet with was state Sen. Sheila Kuehl, D-Los Angeles. Kuehl’s chief of staff spoke briefly to the group, but did not listen to what they had to say. “She came into the reception area and she shut us down,” said Seidenburg. “She had no interest whatsoever in even talking to us. How can a legislator call herself pro-choice when she won’t even listen to what the other choice is?”

Staff members for other two legislators were more accommodating. “We spoke with one aide in a state senator’s office, and he actually got a tear in his eye,” she said. “We presented information that he probably had never thought of from a pro-life perspective. We shared our stories and showed him the developmental models of a fetus.”

“The third legislator’s staff sent us to see an aide in an office across the street,” Seidenburg said. “It turned out that this aide, an aide to a very pro-choice legislator, has an aunt who had an abortion the same year that she was born and at every birthday or major event in her life, her aunt is reminded that she does not have her child. This aide is pro-life! She has never shared her pro-life views with her boss or staff. We have asked her to be the ‘salt’ in her office and open up with her boss. I told her to have courage and not be afraid to share her views. She’s young and it could cost her her job.”

Sills also met some resistance in her lobbying efforts. "One legislator, Assemblyman Dave Jones's (D-Sacramento) staff, spoke to us for a few minutes, then when the topic got uncomfortable, they abruptly left 30 of us in the hallway and locked their door behind them."

Seidenburg says that the influence goes further than appearances. "If we didn't reach the legislators, we at least reached their aides, and maybe they will soon be in a position to influence senior legislators or become legislators themselves. It's time for the Democratic Party to step up and defend the most vulnerable citizens of our state."

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