

# State Republicans signal a possible shift on abortion stance

By AL CROSS  
Political Writer

The effort to soften the Republican Party's national platform plank on abortion got some support yesterday from Kentucky Republicans.

Even as a social conservative and foe of abortion was lining up the vice chairmanship of the state GOP, the abortion plank appeared headed in the opposite direction.

The evidence:

✓ The state party adopted a resolution that omitted previous references to a constitutional amendment that would ban all or almost all abortions.

✓ Jefferson County Clerk Rebecca Jackson, one of 10 co-chairs of the national convention's platform committee, said she thinks the platform should be shortened and wouldn't object to omitting the amendment.

✓ Mary Fisher, who resigned as state Republican chairman last month, said the issue should be dropped from the platform entirely.

The first two events occurred at the state convention in Jeffersontown, where the business included resolutions and election of about a third of

the party executive committee.

Five of the six congressional-district conventions wanted the state resolution to mention the anti-abortion amendment, but the resolutions committee chose not to in an effort to reach out to moderates and promote party unity, said Cheryl Fynboe of Russellville, the committee chairman and a Christian Coalition activist.

The convention ordered the resolutions it adopted to be drafted into a state platform. The national platform will be drafted at the national convention in August.

Jackson said yesterday that Republican National Chairman Haley Barbour had asked her to help run the platform committee. Asked if she favors any change in the abortion plank, she said the lengthy platform needs to be made more succinct so voters can grasp it better.

Asked if abortion foes would see omitting the anti-abortion amendment as a weakening of the plank, Jackson said they should not as long as the rest of the platform is condensed.

Jackson failed to win a national-convention delegate's slot at the party's 3rd District convention last month, but she got one yesterday be-



"The pro-life issue has a place, but those places are in your home, your church, your synagogue . . . and between a doctor and a patient. But I don't think it has a place within the party."

Mary Fisher,  
former state Republican chairman

cause 4th District Rep. Jim Bunning of Southgate gave up his claim to a delegate's seat and became an alternate instead.

The 3rd District GOP organization is controlled by allies of Dr. Frank Simon, a St. Matthews allergist and anti-abortion activist who leads a political organization of his own.

In an interview with The Cincinnati Enquirer, Fisher criticized Simon and his emphasis on abortion.

She said the issue is driving people away from the GOP or keeping them from becoming active while keeping some conservative Democrats from joining the party.

"I don't think this issue belongs as the major issue of the party. I'd like to see it not on the platform," she said. "It's definitely an issue of importance. But it's not the major issue of the party, nor is it my major issue."

Fisher, a Roman Catholic and mother of three, said, "I'm pro-life, but I have tremendous respect for people who are pro-choice, too."

Fisher said Simon has fostered an atmosphere of intolerance, and "they are so forceful on that issue, they have turned people off."

She added, "I'm very frustrated by groups who can agree with you on 51 issues, but if you don't agree on this

one issue, they ostracize you from the party. . . . The pro-life issue has a place, but those places are in your home, your church, your synagogue . . . and between a doctor and a patient."

Simon told The Courier-Journal that "without the pro-life issue, there really is nothing distinctive about the Republican Party."

U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell, a Louisville Republican who once employed Fisher as a field representative, said he disagrees with her comments on abortion but praised her work as party chairman.

"There will be some mention of abortion in the Republican platform," McConnell said. "There has been since 1980 and it didn't keep us from winning then, in 1984 or 1988. And it won't keep us from winning in 1996."

Fisher was chosen as chairman last year by GOP gubernatorial nominee Larry Forgy, who lost last fall's election. She resigned last month after state Rep. Tom Jensen of London said he wanted her job.

Next week the new executive committee will nominate a new slate of statewide officers for election by the party's central committee. If Jensen

replaces Fisher, the vice chairman must be a woman because the top officers must be of opposite sex.

The front-runner for vice chairman is Donna Shedd of Anchorage, who is strongly opposed by moderates who think the party has steered too far to the right, particularly on abortion.

Susan Stokes of Rolling Fields, who lost the 3rd District congressional race in 1994 because of a third-party anti-abortion candidate, said party finance chairman Jim Skaggs of Bowling Green was denied a seat on the executive committee because he refused to promise to vote for Shedd.

Skaggs said, "No one told me that" and questioned the basis of Stokes' assertion.

Shedd was one of eight people on the nominating committee, which also chose about a third of the state's national convention delegates.

She said after the committee meeting that the makeup of the new executive committee looks favorable to her candidacy for vice chairman.

Also running for vice chairman is Ethel Judy of Jeffersontown, who declined to say yesterday whether she favors any change in the abortion plank.