

Ellen McCormack, two-time pro-life candidate for president, dead at 84

MERRICK, N.Y. – A funeral Mass was scheduled for April 2 at Cure of Ars Church in Merrick for Ellen McCormack, whose pro-life views led her to run for president in 1976 and 1980.

McCormack, who was the first woman to qualify for federal matching campaign funds and for Secret Service protection as a candidate, died of congestive heart failure March 27 in Avon, Conn. She was 84.

After abortion was legalized in New York state in 1970, she and other Long Island women formed the Pro-Life Action Committee to fight it. She was chosen by the group to run for the Democratic nomination for president in 1976 to focus attention on the abortion issue.

“I want to defend the unborn child,” she told Catholic News Service in a 1975 interview. “Not one of the other candidates will discuss abortion if they can get away with it.”

At the Democratic National Convention that nominated Jimmy Carter for president, McCormack won a total of 22 delegates – 19 more than were officially pledged to her after she won 238,000 votes in 18 Democratic primaries.

After raising a total of \$525,580 in contributions of \$250 or less from 20 states, she was eligible for \$247,220.37 in federal matching money, which she used primarily for television ads opposing abortion.

Her bid to the Federal Election Commission to certify her eligibility for matching funds was challenged by the National Abortion Rights Action League on the grounds that her campaign’s “apparent” Catholic Church connections violated separation of church and state. She strongly denied such links as did church spokesmen.

Congress revised FEC rules on matching funds following the 1976 election, and McCormack was no longer eligible for the match when she ran as a candidate of the

Right to Life Party in 1980. In between the two national elections, she was an unsuccessful New York State Right to Life Party candidate for New York lieutenant governor in 1978.

Born Eleanor Rose Cullen on Sept. 15, 1926, in New York, she was married for 44 years to Francis McCormack, who became a deputy inspector in the New York Police Department before his death in 1993.

She is survived by four children, 11 grandchildren, four great-grandchildren and two sisters.