

Ireland's Labor Party pledges to seek legalization of abortion

DUBLIN – In an election campaign document, Ireland's Labor Party pledged to introduce legislation legalizing abortion if the party rises to power.

The minority Labor Party was running second in polls prior to the Feb. 25 general election, trailing the center right main opposition party Fine Gael.

The current governing Fianna Fail party and Fine Gael have long opposed abortion.

Ireland is one of only two European countries – Malta being the other – that prohibits abortion except under limited conditions.

In the final paragraph in a chapter titled “Fairness” in what the Labor Party called its “Manifesto 2011,” the party pledged to “legislate in accordance with the Supreme Court judgment in the ‘X case’ and the recent ruling by the European Court of Human Rights.”

In the “X case” in 1992, the Irish Supreme Court established the right of Irish women to an abortion if a pregnant woman's life was at risk as a result of the pregnancy. In December, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Ireland's laws banning abortion breach European human rights law.

The European court's decision has galvanized groups supporting abortion to push for new legislation legalizing the procedure.

William Binchy, professor of law at the University of Dublin's Trinity College School of Law, said Ireland is at a crossroad in relation to the “X case.”

“If we implement ‘X’ it has to be according to the Supreme Court decision, which means abortion through the whole period of pregnancy and as a cure for suicidal ideation,” Binchy told Catholic News Service.

The alternative, which Binchy said he supports, is to have a “constitutional underpinning for what happens in hospitals every day in Ireland, where doctors try

to save two lives and the unborn is treated as a patient.”

The election campaign has been dominated by economic, banking and employment issues, and the Labor Party’s 96-page campaign platform offers proposals related to education, job creation, housing, assistance to people living in poverty, women’s rights, preserving the environment, tourism and health care.

The document also called for a referendum to allow same-sex marriage, adoption by same-sex couples and legislation to allow embryonic stem cell research in line with recommendations of the Irish Council for Bioethics. The council closed its doors Dec. 1 after eight years when the Irish government discontinued funding it.

However, a recent opinion piece in the Irish Independent newspaper brought abortion to center stage. In the piece, columnist David Quinn explained the implications of legalizing abortion and pointed out that the Labor leader Eamon Gilmore “favors abortion where the ‘health’ of the mother is in danger. In practice, this would replicate in Ireland the British abortion law.”

Abortion has been legal in the United Kingdom under the Abortion Act adopted in 1967. At the time, it was among the most liberal in Europe. The act was amended in 1990 allowing abortion to full term for disability and to preserve the life and health of a pregnant woman.

Meanwhile, in the run-up to the election, the Pro Life Campaign mounted a postcard campaign, distributing hundreds of thousands of cards calling on candidates to commit to defending human life at all stages. Voters can also send e-cards to their candidates.

John Smyth of the Pro Life Campaign told CNS that the organization had been inundated with offers of help since announcing the postcard effort. He said the campaign also asked Fine Gael and Fianna Fail leaders to restate their position on abortion.

Results of a Pro Life Campaign-commissioned poll released Feb. 16 showed that 68 percent of respondents support legal protection for unborn children while at the same time ensuring that women receive all necessary medical care during

pregnancy.