

Choice in the Balance After *Roe*: Students Unite

By Cari Sietstra

“Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Abortion bans have got to go!” I spent a morning in early November carrying signs and calling slogans like this one, among more than 150 activists marching down Market Street in San Francisco, protesting the so-called partial birth abortion ban signed by President Bush that morning. Television outlets across the country beamed pictures of the president signing this bill into law, flanked by a coterie of powerful legislators—all of them white and all of them men. Already tied up in litigation, this first-ever federal abortion ban may well remain enjoined, but if the Supreme Court loses just one pro-choice vote, the fates of pregnant women throughout the United States will be decided by these politicians— not by American women and their doctors.

The partial birth abortion ban wasn’t the only choice-related story in the early November news cycle. In congress, a group of more than 50 House members introduced legislation to rescind FDA approval of mifepristone (RU-486); in California, Governor Schwarzenegger supports ongoing efforts to restrict teenagers’ reproductive rights – this in the nation’s largest and arguably most pro-choice state. All in all, it was a bad month for those of use who support the idea that individual women and men, not bureaucrats should make private, moral decisions about reproductive health.

The struggle to preserve and regain reproductive rights will be a tough, long legal fight. New state and local laws restrict the reproductive rights of teenagers, poor women, and immigrants at a time when federal judges appointed by the Bus Administration have made the federal bench far more conservative. Federal policies and state laws grant “unborn children” legal rights that could undermine *Roe*, while in the international arena the U.S. blocks funding for family planning.

If we are to win this continuing legal fight, we will need well-educated, well-trained, committed lawyers on campuses nationwide, who can craft the most compelling arguments to limit the scope of those laws; to overturn unconstitutional restrictions; and to lobby for new, constructive legislation to protect reproductive rights.

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