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Abortion in America: 45 Years Later

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On the morning of January 19th, thousands of pro-life advocates flooded the streets of Washington D.C. for the 45th March For Life, an event held annually since the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* that ruled criminalization of abortion in most cases to be unconstitutional. Their signs eliminated any possible confusion as to what their position might be: “Choose Adoption,” “I Am The Pro-Life Generation,” “We Don’t Need Planned Parenthood.” Several members of the U.S. Congress spoke at the event, with House Speaker Ryan thanking God “for giving us a pro-life president back in the White House.”

The most noteworthy event of the day, however, was not Ryan’s speech or that of any other. It was the presence of President Trump via satellite feed from the White House Rose Garden, making him the first sitting President to address the event. Though he long ago described himself as being “very pro-choice,” his current rhetoric makes it clear that he now has a different position.

He praised the audience for their devotion to the pro-life agenda as though it were intertwined with their devotion to America: “You love your families, you love your neighbors, you love our nation, and you love every child, born and unborn, because you believe that every life is sacred, that every child is a precious gift from God.”

This, of course, shouldn’t be a surprise to anyone. Since the start of his campaign in 2015, Trump has sought

honor, exemplified by his administration's support of a Colorado baker who is now at the center of a Supreme Court case due to his religious objection to creating a wedding cake for a gay couple.

In the days leading up to the March for Life, he announced that a new office would be created to handle complaints of medical professionals with religious objections to certain procedures including abortion and assisted suicide, and he declared January 22nd to be National Sanctity of Human Life Day. It is no coincidence that January 22nd is the anniversary of Roe v. Wade.

Since the historic 1973 decision, the battle over the role of abortion in America has been persistent and divisive. A 2017 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 57% of Americans believe abortion should be legal in most or all cases, while 40% should it should be illegal in most or all cases. Another poll conducted in same year found that 69% of Americans don't believe that *Roe v. Wade* should be completely overturned.

Despite its gradual acceptance within the public, state legislatures and the U.S. Congress itself have arguably intensified their efforts to restrict abortion as much as legally possible. However, many of these attempts have been unsuccessful in recent years. In 2016, the Supreme Court struck down a Texas law that would have set such strict guidelines that dozens of clinics would have been forced to shut their doors. In 2017, a federal judge blocked an Indiana law that would have banned abortions based on the presence of a genetic disability.

The back and forth has become exhausting to watch, and despite the U.S. Senate's recent failure to pass a bill that would ban abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy, there is a growing fear that the Trump administration will attempt to eliminate 45 years of progress by having *Roe v. Wade* overturned in the courts. Though such a feat is unlikely, the mere thought of it is enough to strike fear into the minds of those who vividly remember the era of back-alley abortions.

The stories of the pre-*Roe* era sound as though they came straight out of a horror movie. Desperate women resorted to drinking chemicals, shoving toxic solutions into their uterus, jabbing their insides with coat hangers and knitting needles, or going to clandestine providers who were inexperienced and provided painful botched procedures that left many recipients hospitalized and psychologically scarred. Before *Roe v. Wade*, there were between 200,000 and 1.2 million illegal and unsafe abortions every year in the United States during the 1950s and 60s, and by 1965 they accounted for 17% of deaths attributed to pregnancy and childbirth.

Then *Roe v. Wade* changed everything. In a 7-2 decision, it was ruled that criminalizing abortion during the first trimester violated a woman's implicit right to privacy as established by the 14th Amendment, although

there was still room for states to ban the procedure before viability to protect the woman's health or afterwards unless the woman's life was at stake.

This marked the beginning of the war for states to chip away at the new protections, but the Court upheld its central position time and time again. Though limitations and restrictions have made it more and more difficult for many women to obtain the procedure without encountering significant hurdles, the Court's persistence has made *Roe v. Wade* a legal precedent that would be incredibly difficult to overturn.

But that doesn't stop the cautious optimism of today's pro-life movement. They saw the opportunity for a major victory after the Planned Parenthood video controversy in 2015, but as of now the health provider is still thriving and as of 2017, 62% of Americans want to keep it that way. In the meantime, the mortality rate associated with abortion has dropped dramatically to 0.7 out of every 100,000 procedures. With the presence of a pro-life president in the White House, however, they see yet another sliver of hope on the horizon of Capitol Hill. The question then remains: Will Trump finally be the savior of life that they've been looking for?

The simplest answer is no. It's not possible. As long as there are those who believe that *Roe v. Wade*'s legacy should be wiped from American culture, there will be those who will do everything in their power to fight for what they believe to be the right of a woman to make the decision as to whether or not to have an abortion. Even after 45 years, the core of *Roe v. Wade* that solidifies a woman's right to have the procedure in a safe environment remains.

There are some who wonder if, at some point, there will be some sort of consensus that accepts *Roe v. Wade* as the law of the land and lets such strong efforts from both sides be directed elsewhere. Another question with a simple answer: No. As seen by the strong turnouts at both the March for Life and various women's marches around the country on the first anniversary of Trump's inauguration, the fight over abortion will continue to rage on into an uncertain future.

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