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Teepen: An unhealthy decision  
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Brace for a hailstorm of anti-abortion legislation from Congress and the states. The U.S. Supreme Court all but invited the storm by accepting Congress's ban of intact dilation and extraction, the rarely used abortion method which the anti-abortion lobby dubbed "partial-birth abortion" for its own PR purposes.

The gambit worked. Here we are with the first Supreme Court ruling that kisses off women's health as the abiding factor in abortion issues. That concern was at the center of the court's *Roe v. Wade* ruling, which in 1973 rescued women from the considerable risks of maiming and even death in secret abortions.

Dilation and extraction is a rare procedure. The last study, in 2000, found it accounted for just 0.17 percent of all U.S. abortions, reserved usually for medically difficult circumstances. The anti-abortion folks pounced on it because the method can be made to sound especially gruesome.

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology holds that the procedure is the safest for women with some troubled pregnancies. The justices preferred instead the word of politicians in Congress, who simply passed a law declaring that d-and-e is never necessary, so there!

Expect no noticeable decline in abortion. There are other means for ending such at-issue pregnancies. All the legislators have done is to forbid women to choose the method physicians say would be safest for them.

But reducing abortions was never the idea behind this long campaign.

Anti-abortion activists had been maneuvering to create an opening in Roe. Now they have a big one. A Supreme Court moved sharply to the right by President Bush's appointments overruled three federal district judges and three appellate benches, and its own precedents, to endorse the ban. Expect no end of harassing legislation to aim for the opening the conservative high court has created.

The Georgia legislature recently enacted legislation requiring physicians to offer sonograms of their fetuses to women who seek an abortion. And prior to an abortion, women must certify in writing either that they did or didn't choose to view the image and listen to any present fetal heartbeat.

According to the legislation, that feature and other features of the law are designed to "protect unborn children from a woman's uninformed decision to have an abortion."

A Supreme Court recently skewed against lawful abortion and newly so-so about women's health should have no problem with such condescending legislation, which views women as just so many sillies who don't understand abortion or their own minds and need legislators to save them from their own flightiness.

There are some 43 million of us in this country without health insurance. Data suggest that epidemic obesity may soon start cutting U.S. life expectancy. Public hospitals are financially fragile. If Congress and state legislatures are suddenly all fired up about health, there is a lot of work they could be doing before legislating who may have which surgery in what circumstances.

Instead, Congress is practicing medicine by majority vote, and the United States Supreme Court thinks that is just fine.