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COMMENTARY

## **Hutchison: Choice comes down to whether women vote**

Sue Hutchison, SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

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Memo to the bloc of 20 million single women who didn't vote in the last presidential election: If the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling upholding the ban on a specific abortion procedure isn't a loud and clear message that your vote matters, then I don't know what is.

Let's review: Congress passed a law banning the late-term abortion procedure in 2003. But district and appeals courts in three states, including California, ruled that the law was unconstitutional because it didn't make an exception for the health of the woman. Then, after President Bush was re-elected, he appointed two very conservative judges to the Supreme Court. The new majority view disregards medical evidence and declares that the law's lack of an exception to protect a woman's health is not a good enough reason to keep from banning this type of abortion.

The procedure, called "intact dilation and extraction" but dubbed "partial-birth abortion" by anti-abortion sloganeers, occurs only in the second or third trimester of pregnancy and is rarely used. But what is most significant about the court's ruling, other than its paternalistic view of women's rights over their own bodies, is that it leaves the door wide open for restricting other kinds of abortions. Clearly, the spirit of the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision has been seriously undermined.

Or, in the words of Linda Williams, CEO of Planned Parenthood's chapter in San Jose: "We are now in a post-Roe environment. This decision showed a total disregard for precedent."

For all the non-voting women who say that election issues are too abstract and don't seem to have anything to do with their lives, I give you the recent 5-4 Supreme Court ruling on abortion.

In Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's dissenting opinion, she minced no words about how ominous this decision is for women's rights. "This way of thinking reflects ancient notions of women's place in the family and under the Constitution," Ginsburg wrote. "Ideas that have long since been discredited."

Tammy Watts, who lived in Santa Cruz, Calif., in 1995 when she had a late-term abortion, couldn't agree more.

Watts' decision to end the life of her unborn daughter, whom she and her husband had already named Mackenzie, was the most painful of her life. But when she discovered in her seventh month of pregnancy that her daughter's brain was malformed and her liver and stomach were growing on the outside of her body, she said, "We knew we had to end Mackenzie's suffering."

After agonizing discussions with her family, her pastor and her doctors, Watts had an intact-dilation-and-extraction abortion. "This decision should be between a woman, her family and her god," she told me. "It has no place in the courts or in the Legislature."

But the Supreme Court has just given state legislatures the green light to pass bills putting other restrictions on abortions that could drive some clinics out of business — clinics which, in many cases, are the only places low-income women can go for health care.

"If we still had the old Congress in place, we would probably have five horrendous bills being presented right now in light of this Supreme Court decision," Williams said.

But some members of Congress who almost surely would have sponsored anti-abortion-rights bills were kicked out of office last November. Your vote matters.

So, to all those women who didn't vote last time but finally can get into the game during next year's presidential election: Are you galvanized now?