

The future of Roe v. Wade: Our work continues

By Darrah DiGiorgio Johnson

Women across the country won a major victory 41 years ago when the United States Supreme Court affirmed our right to safe and legal abortion. In Roe v. Wade, the Court confirmed that the constitutionally protected right to privacy includes every woman's right to make her own personal medical decisions without the interference of politicians. Who knew that we'd still be fighting for a woman's ability to make her own reproductive decisions 41 years later?

Since 2010, when Tea Party politicians picked up key seats in legislatures across the country, we've seen an unprecedented assault designed to chip away at access to safe and legal abortion. Politicians campaigned with the promises of creating jobs and boosting our economy. Yet instead they immediately became laser-focused on ending access to safe and legal abortion and limiting women's health care options.

The efforts to end access to safe and legal abortion have a particularly harsh impact on women and families struggling to make ends meet, who often can't afford to travel hundreds of miles to the nearest health center — if they can make it to a doctor at all. Rather than helping Americans in need, these politicians are making it more difficult for those without resources.

According to recent data compiled by the independent research organization the Guttmacher Institute, more

than 200 restrictions on abortion access have become law since 2010. The result: More than half of American women of reproductive age now live in states where access to abortion is obstructed. Sadly, these attacks are happening in states that already have a great need for health care.

Here in California, we are fortunate to have a progressive legislature committed to maintaining access to safe and legal abortion. San Diego Assembly Majority Leader Toni Atkins authored a bill that would expand access by allowing trained Physician Assistants, Nurse Practitioners, and Certified Midwives to provide early abortion care.

But in just the last five months, politicians in Texas, North Carolina, Ohio, and Michigan have broken or bent the rules to jam through abortion restrictions that the public overwhelmingly opposes. They're using every trick in the book — votes in the middle of the night, special sessions, and procedural loopholes.

Physicians and other medical experts, including the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, which released this statement last year, oppose these actions on medical grounds. These actions also are deeply unpopular with Americans of all political stripes. This is most apparent when I look to young leaders in our community and beyond.

Six in ten millennials believe abortion should be available in all or most cases, which is what we see across generational lines. Like a growing number of

Americans, young people often do not identify with the traditional “pro-choice” or “pro-life” labels, which don't reflect the complexity of the issue or the conversation around abortion. And more than any other generation, millennials believe that safe and legal abortion should be available in their communities.

Young people are energizing our movement. They led to a decisive 10-point defeat of the Albuquerque 20-week abortion ban and the defeat of extreme Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli in the Virginia gubernatorial race based largely on his opposition to women's access to safe and legal abortion. And of course, they packed the Texas state capitol in support of Texas State Senator Wendy Davis while she held her ground in the historic 11-hour marathon filibuster to run out the clock on an extreme and dangerous anti-women's health bill.

Millions of abortion rights supporters, both young and old alike, work in all 50 states to fight back against this unprecedented and orchestrated wave of attacks, and we're not going anywhere. After a record outpouring of opposition to these measures from the Deep South to the heart of the Midwest, it is crystal clear that women and men in states across the country want leaders who value women's health.

As we commemorate the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, supporters of access to safe, legal abortion must remain vigilant in protecting our rights for generations to come.

—Darrah DiGiorgio Johnson is the president & CEO of Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest. ▼