

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With the Interagency Task Force on Reproductive Health Care Access

January 22, 2024

Thank you, Doctor. Appreciate it.

Well, good afternoon, folks.

Doctor, thank you for sharing your story. And I'm sure there's others like it many doctors across America have had to contemplate.

Fifty-one years ago today, in *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court recognized a woman's constitutional right to choose—constitutional right to choose—the right to make a deeply personal decision with her doctor, free from the interference of politicians.

I believe *Roe v. Wade* was right. I'm not supporting—we didn't—they didn't support abortion on demand. It was *Roe v. Wade*. *Roe v. Wade* was the decision. And a majority of Americans agree.

But then, a year and a half ago, this Supreme Court—this Supreme Court—made an extreme decision, overturning *Roe* with their *Dobbs* decision, to rip away a constitutional right from the American people, which had never been done before—a fundamental right ripped away—important to so many Americans, a right that is vital to a country founded on the idea of freedom.

I said on the—on that day that *Roe* was overturned, the health and lives of women in this Nation would now be at risk. And that has unfortunately proven to be true. They've been at risk. It made them at risk—put them at risk.

Today, in 2024 in America, women are turned away from emergency rooms, forced to travel hundreds of miles to get basic health care in another State that may have a different rule, forced to go to court to plead for help.

Thanks to [Think of; White House correction] the mothers of two in Texas—a mother of two in Texas, who was pregnant with her third child. From her doctor, she received the news that no one wants to hear: The life of the child and her own life were at risk if she continued her pregnancy. But instead of being able to receive care from her doctor, she was blocked by the State of Texas attorney general and the State supreme court.

Think about that. As she and her family were going through the frightening, heartbreaking ordeal, she had to fight extreme politicians in the court. They turned a deeply private and painful matter into a public matter. She ultimately had to leave the State to get the help she needed to protect herself and her ability to have more children in the future.

The cruelty is astounding—an affront to a woman's dignity, being told by extreme politicians to wait, to get sicker and sicker to the point where her life may be in danger before you can get the care you need.

That cruel reality is the result of extreme Republicans who, for years, have made it their mission to end the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Since *Roe* was overturned, in 21 States, abortion bans are now in effect, many with no exception for rape or incest.

We have doctors—we have doctors with us today who are on the frontlines of this crisis. And they can attest to the consequences that these extreme laws are having on doctors and on

their ability to care for their patients. Some doctors are feeling their—fleeing their home States because of laws that would send them to prison for providing evidence-based health care.

In States like Texas, doctors can get a life sentence—a life sentence—for providing the care they were trained to provide. It's outrageous. It's simply outrageous.

And, frankly, this is just the beginning. My congressional Republican friends are going to even further—further extremes to undermine a woman's rights to threaten—and threatening the lives of women.

Three different Republican Members in the United States Congress have proposed three different additional national bans to criminalize health care in every State. Let me tell you what they are.

One is a zero-week ban with absolutely no exceptions—a zero-week ban with absolutely no exceptions. The second is a 6-week ban. The penalty for violating it is jail. The third is a 15-week ban. The penalty is a 5-year prison sentence.

That means even if you live in a State where the extremist Republicans are not running the show, your right to choose, your right to privacy would still be at risk if this law was passed—any of these were passed nationally.

And the extreme right is trying to limit all women in America from getting a safe and effective medication, approved by the Federal Drug Administration over 20 years ago based on the FDA's independent expert judgment. They're trying to block women from getting this medication even in States where abortion is legal.

And on top of all of that, if you live in a State where you cannot get this care you need and you make a plan to travel to a State where you can get the medicine [medical care; White House correction], Republicans official [Republican officials; White House correction] are trying to stop that as well.

And get this, in Alabama—as my mother would say, "God love them"—the attorney general is threatening to prosecute people who help family members travel to another State—who help family members travel to another State.

Folks, this is what it looks like when the right to privacy is under attack. These extreme laws have no place—no place—in the United States of America.

You know, the American people know these laws are wrong. The vast majority of Americans believe the right to choose is fundamental.

Since the Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, every single time abortion has been on the ballot—and by the way, a lot of people don't really understand. The Court said that it's up to the States to decide whether or not abortions are valid. So it says that if the State comes along and wants to say, "No, no, it's valid in my State—*Roe v. Wade* is valid in my State," it's allowed.

Well, guess what? Every single time that decision had been put before the people of a State—on the ballot in Ohio, Kansas, Michigan, Kentucky—voters have voted to protect reproductive rights. But we need these protections in every State, because your family [ability; White House correction] to have access to health care should not depend on your ZIP Code. It should not depend on your ZIP Code.

As I've made clear, we have to do what the Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs* would allow, and that is: Congress must codify *Roe v. Wade* for all the States in America.

Stop playing politics with the women's lives and freedom. Let doctors do their job.

Let me say it again: Pass laws restoring the protections of *Roe v. Wade* for women in every State. That's what can be done under this—on the—even under the *Dobbs* decision. But under this Court, that is going to be constitutional if we pass it nationwide.

That's what I'm working for. I'm working for that law. And when they send me that law, I'm going to sign it immediately and restore that right. Until then, my administration is going to keep working to protect women in the wake of the Supreme Court's extreme decision.

That's why I created a Task Force to ensure we are doing everything we can to support women. I've signed Executive orders and my administration has taken action to ensure that women get the care they need in medical emergencies, to protect a woman's right to travel to get health care, to protect a woman's right to receive health care free from discrimination, and to protect her privacy.

The idea that a woman should have to carry a fetus after she has been raped or a victim of incest is just—I think it's just cruel. To me, it's outrageous.

The idea that a woman who receives competent medical advice that the fetus she's carrying wouldn't live and will impact on her ability to have children in the future and still gets [can't get; White House correction] medical care—can't get medical—it's ridiculous.

I could go on, but I'm already taking too much time.

I want to thank the Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris, for her leadership on this important issue as she travels the country in her fight for freedom.

I'd also like to thank the Gender Policy Adviser—my Gender Policy Adviser, Jen Klein. Jen—where's Jen sitting? There you are, Jen. Thank you. And Secretary Becerra, who's sitting right next to her, for their leadership on this Task Force.

And I want to thank all the members of my Cabinet here today, including the Attorney General for leading efforts and the—at the Department of Justice to protect reproductive rights in court, and Secretary McDonough for leading the important work being done at the VA.

I know that folks across America are worried about what they're seeing happening to women all across America. I hear about it everywhere I go. My message is: We're fighting hard to reinstate your rights and the rights to protect women and families and doctors who care for those women.

And we need the American people to keep making their voices heard so congressional Republicans finally get the message that these laws do not represent the United States of America. Your voice will have a final say. This is not over.

With that, I'm going to sit down, and we're going to get to work.

Thank you all for being here. And let's get this done. It's important.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:44 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Tani Malhotra, obstetrician-gynecologist and maternal and fetal medicine specialist, University Hospitals, and assistant professor, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, who introduced the President; Dallas, TX, resident Kate Cox, who, due to Texas's restrictive abortion law, traveled to another State to obtain an abortion after receiving a lethal fetal diagnosis; State Attorney General W. Kenneth Paxton, Jr., of Texas; Sen. Randal H. Paul; Rep. George J. "Mike" Kelly, Jr.; Sen. Lindsey O. Graham; and State Attorney General Steve Marshall of Alabama.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Reproductive Health Care Access, Interagency Task Force on, meeting with President.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Becerra, Xavier; Cox, Kate; Graham, Lindsey O.; Harris, Kamala D.; Kelly, George J. "Mike," Jr.; Klein, Jennifer L.; Malhotra, Tani; Marshall, Steve; McDonough, Denis R.; Paul, Randal H.; Paxton, W. Kenneth, Jr.

Subjects: Abortion; Civil rights, privacy; Food and Drug Administration; Reproductive health care; Reproductive Health Care Access, Interagency Task Force on; Secretary of Health and Human Services; Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Sexual assault and harassment; U.S. Supreme Court opinion overturning 1973 decision in Roe v. Wade; Vice President; White House Gender Policy Council; Women's health issues; Women's rights and gender equality.

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