

Can the Unborn Feel Pain?

The following press release reveals how committed the pro-abortion movement is in sustaining its hold on abortion rights. They now have reluctantly conceded that pre-born children feel pain in the womb. However, despite this fact they continue to argue that nothing in their movement has changed—abortion should still be legal.

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NEW YORK —

Coming just two days after George W. Bush's inauguration, Saturday's anniversary of the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion is dominated by the hopes of one side — and fears of the other — that the president will try to overturn Roe v. Wade through appointments to fill expected high court vacancies.

Anti-abortion activists were among the legions of Bush supporters converging on Washington in the past few days, and most will remain for Monday's annual March for Life. Though Bush is widely admired within the movement, some of its militants still question his commitment to reversing the 32-year-old decision.

"President Bush has an ethical obligation to protect the unborn, and he has a political debt of honor to those who put him in office," said Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue. "His staff must thoroughly investigate any possible appointee, and if they are not unalterably committed to overturning Roe v. Wade, they must be dismissed from consideration."

Anti-abortion lawmakers in Congress and several states, meanwhile, are introducing the latest in a wave of measures aimed at making it more daunting to obtain an abortion. The bills would require abortion providers to tell women 20 weeks or more pregnant that an abortion could cause pain to their fetus, and to offer anesthesia administered directly to the fetus.

Abortion-rights supporters, simultaneously apprehensive and determined, are engaging in postelection reassessments, some of them wondering openly if their rhetoric and strategies should be modified to better compete for public support.

Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice, is suggesting there is little to be gained — in the court of public opinion — by opposing the notion that a fetus represents some form of human life. She proposes "a new pro-choice discourse" that would acknowledge both women's rights and respect for fetal life.

"Abortion is a serious matter; it is a woman's right and no woman needs to apologize for making this decision," Kissling wrote recently. "On the other hand, no woman needs to brag about her choice, and the decision of one pro-choice organization to sell T-shirts announcing 'I had an abortion' was in poor taste." However, Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, said abortion-rights supporters should not cede the terrain of "moral values" to their opponents.

"We need to talk to neighbors around the kitchen table about the values of freedom and privacy; we don't run away from the arguments," she said in an interview. "Our movement is on stronger ground when we take seriously the moral dimensions of the issue."

Vicki Saporta, president of the National Abortion Federation, said her fears about future judicial appointments were tempered by polls indicating most Americans don't want Roe v. Wade overturned, and

agreed with Keenan that "we shouldn't think that the positions we've taken are not just and moral." Saporta and her allies are reacting cautiously to the legislation regarding fetal pain. "We're looking at the science behind that bill," she said. "We want to make sure women get correct medical and scientific information."

Kissling, of Catholics for a Free Choice, says the legislation provides abortion-rights supporters with a chance to show they do value fetal life. She objects to the federal bill, saying it requires doctors to follow a script that is insensitive to women, but she supports the concept of offering fetal anesthesia in appropriate circumstances. "Abortion should be a humane and compassionate procedure," she wrote in the latest edition of her organization's journal.

Dave Andrusko of the National Right to Life Committee accused Kissling of "Alice in Wonderland" reasoning. You can't concede that a fetus is human, and then say it's allowable to destroy it, he argues. In addition to Congress, fetal pain bills are being introduced in Arkansas, Colorado, Montana and elsewhere. Another Montana bill would require issuing death certificates for abortions; South Dakota lawmakers may vote to ban abortions altogether.

In the days prior to the Roe anniversary, there were other notable abortion-related developments:—NARAL Pro-Choice America projected that 19 states would quickly outlaw abortion, and 19 more might follow suit, if Roe v. Wade were overturned. This could happen if two of the justices on the nine-member Supreme Court who support abortion rights departed and were replaced by justices opposing abortions.

Norma McCorvey, the woman known as "Jane Roe" in Roe v. Wade, asked the Supreme Court to overturn its 1973 decision. McCorvey now opposes abortion and said the case should be heard again in light of evidence that the procedure may harm women. Roman Catholic parishioners in Colorado said they would bury the ashes of up to 1,000 aborted fetuses Sunday to mark the Roe anniversary.

Liberal and moderate religious leaders, including at least 150 rabbis, mobilized in an effort to spread the message that not all devoutly religious Americans oppose abortions.