

January 22, 2009

I rise today to commemorate the 36th anniversary of Roe v. Wade.

On January 22, 1973, Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun penned the historic majority opinion in the Roe v. Wade case. He wrote that "right of privacy, whether it be founded in the Fourteenth Amendment's concept of personal liberty and restrictions upon state action, as we feel it is, or, as the District Court determined, in the Ninth Amendment's reservation of rights to the people, is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy." Justice Blackmun's words confirmed the 7-2 landmark decision that all women have the constitutional right to choose.

Roe v. Wade established that reproductive healthcare is a personal matter that should be left to individuals. The question of whether or not to have an abortion is not an easy one, it is one of the most difficult decisions that a woman can face. While a woman's doctor, clergy, friends, and family may have opinions, the ultimate decision rests solely with her. This is not a decision that should be forced upon a woman by any government.

Having the right to choose is an essential right that should be protected, however there is much that can and should be done to decrease the need for abortion. That is why I have consistently supported comprehensive sexual education in our schools. Our investment in abstinence-only education over the last 8 years has failed in giving our teenagers the medically accurate, life-saving information about birth control and sexually transmitted infections they need to make informed decisions. I also support overturning the "global gag rule." President Bush enacted the "global gag rule" 8 years ago today to prohibit international family planning organizations that receive funding from the United States from being able to advocate for choice. The global gag rule also bans foreign non-governmental organizations, NGOs, from being able, using their own funds, to engage in free speech and assembly activities on a woman's right to choose, and also prevented health care providers from counseling the world's poorest women about all their legal health care options. Reversing this policy will improve maternal and child health in developing countries, reduce infant mortality, lead to better diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases and reduce the incidence of unintended pregnancy and abortion.

Roe v. Wade marked a drastic change in our national policy on reproductive rights and I urge my colleagues to commemorate the 36th anniversary of this ruling.