



United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 108<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 150

WASHINGTON, Monday, April 26, 2004

No. 54

## Senate

### Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein

#### *“A March For Women’s Lives”*

MRS FEINSTEIN: Mr. President, at the “March for Women’s Lives” yesterday, I joined the hundreds of thousands of women from across the United States and the world to show support for a woman’s right to choose and for access to reproductive health services.

This demonstration comes at a time when women’s reproductive rights are in immediate danger. Not only has President Bush done more to roll back women’s reproductive health than any president in history, opponents of abortion in Congress have made advances in the assault on the right to choose.

In the past decade, Congress has voted on choice related issues 168 times. Women lost in 136 of those votes.

As if these attacks themselves were not disturbing enough, the fact that they have gone largely unnoticed and unchallenged is even more alarming.

That is why, now, more than ever since *Roe v. Wade*, it is vital to show President Bush and his friends in Congress that we will fight to maintain women’s reproductive rights and access to health care in America.

Since the day George W. Bush took office, his administration has been systematically chipping away at women’s reproductive rights.

One of his first acts as President was to reinstate the global gag rule, which prevents U.S. foreign aid from funding any overseas clinic that performs or counsels women on abortion.

The Bush Administration has announced at international conferences that the United States believes that life begins at conception.

They have canceled the United States’ contribution to the United Nations’ family planning program.

Instead, they have promoted abstinence-only sex education for young people both here and abroad, even though their success at preventing pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases has been questioned.

George W. Bush has also consistently nominated judicial candidates who oppose a woman’s right to choose to lifetime appointments on the federal bench.

Just this month, he signed the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, which, for the first time, puts into Federal law the concept that life begins at conception. This will, in effect, grant a fetus or even a fertilized egg separate rights as a person and can now be used legally to further chip away at a woman’s constitutional right to choose.

I offered an alternative to this bill that would have provided the same effect and punishment for offenders in criminal law, but did NOT address the profound and deeply divisive question of when life begins.

The President also approved a ban on so-called partial birth abortions, which is the first law outlawing abortion since the *Roe v. Wade* decision. It is also the first time that a medical procedure has ever been criminalized.

This unconstitutional law has not yet been enforced because of lawsuits pending against it in Federal courts in San Francisco, New York and Lincoln, Nebraska.

In disregard for people’s privacy, U.S. Justice Department attorneys defending the law have attempted to compel two doctors to turn over private patient abortion records.

Who knows where it will stop? We are on a slippery slope toward granting fetuses greater rights than the mothers who carry them. It may not be long before common forms of contraception, in-vitro fertilization and stem-cell research are banned in the name of the unborn.

These Federal laws, along with more than 350 anti-choice measures enacted by states, are setting legal precedents that abortion opponents will use to challenge *Roe v. Wade*, which is perilously close to being overturned.

The Supreme Court appears to be only one vote away from reversing *Roe v. Wade* and taking the decision to have an abortion away from a woman and her doctor and putting it in the hands of politicians.

It is entirely possible that abortion will once again be illegal in this country.

For many women, it has been easy to take the right to choose for granted, because it is all they have ever known.

I remember a time, however, when an estimated 1.2 million women each year resorted to illegal, back alley

abortions despite the possibility of death and infection.

I remember that time very vividly. In college during the 1950s, I knew young women who found themselves pregnant with no options. I even knew a woman who committed suicide because she was pregnant and abortion was illegal in the United States.

I also remember the passing of a collection plate in my college dormitory so that another friend could go to Mexico for an abortion.

That is why it is so important to show President Bush that we will NOT just stand back and do nothing while women's rights are taken away.

Women have a fundamental right to determine when and whether to become a mother. The government should not be able to take that right away.

We cannot go back to a time without choice.