

Column: Anti-abortion forces again show their utter disregard for women

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For many years, I made a sincere effort to understand the deeply held belief among some people that abortion is tantamount to murder.

I interviewed priests, ministers, philosophy professors, antiabortion activists of all ages and young adults who believe they are survivors of an “abortion holocaust” because they were born after 1973, the year the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion.

Nothing they ever told me swayed my opinion about the righteousness and importance of abortion access.

For a time, I embraced the Clinton-era slogan that abortion should be “safe, legal and rare.” But that came to seem like a defensive accommodation to the noisy, antiabortion right.

Still, I struggled to conceive how there might be middle ground in this debate.

I am long past that.

When it comes to reproductive freedom, I now see, there is no middle ground.

You either believe women have the right to control their own bodies, or you don't.

The antiabortion movement has unleashed dark, regressive forces.

I listened to the (now disgraced) Fox News star Bill O'Reilly constantly refer to George Tiller, the Kansas abortion doctor, as “Tiller the Killer,” then feign shock when a religious nut murdered Tiller in the vestibule of his own church in 2009.

I was slack-jawed in 2012, when Republican presidential candidates seriously debated whether women should have access to birth control. Perhaps you have forgotten that Republican candidate Rick Santorum spoke of the “dangers of contraception” and said states should be free to ban birth control? I haven’t.

Or maybe you have put it out of your mind that in 2014, the Supreme Court ruled that employers’ religious beliefs should be able to determine what kind of health coverage their women employees are entitled to. I haven’t.

You have probably never heard of the civil rights activist Florynce Kennedy, who died at age 84 in 2000. She was a feminist attorney who, among other things, gave speeches with Gloria Steinem in the 1970s.

Kennedy used to repeat something she said she once heard from a female taxi driver in Boston: “Honey, if men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament.”

I believe that pithy maxim is the most straightforward explanation for why we are still at war over our right to choose when and whether to have children.

It’s about control. Control of women’s sexuality. Control of women’s lives.

And how can anyone who has been paying attention — to the sex scandals in the church, to the grotesque revelations of the #MeToo movement — not understand that men often believe they are entitled to dominion over the bodies of women and children?

Which brings us to Alabama’s idiotic new abortion law.

Signed into law Wednesday night by Republican Gov. Kay Ivey, it is a shocking new law in the campaign against women by Christian conservatives. It bans abortions at all stages and criminalizes the procedure for doctors, who could be charged with felonies and sentenced to life terms in prison. It does not contain exceptions for women who become pregnant through rape or incest. It allows abortion only if the mother’s life is at risk.

The blatantly unconstitutional law is a tactic to get the issue before the Supreme Court, which has refused to overturn Roe vs. Wade each time the matter has come

before it. The court has allowed states to narrow abortion rights, for example, by requiring parental consent for minors or a waiting period. But it has never struck at the heart of Roe, which forbids states from outlawing abortion altogether.

Some conservatives have argued that the law is a gift to the reproductive rights movement, that it is so harsh and unrealistic it will backfire, catalyzing support for groups like Planned Parenthood, which has been the target of some of the most inane antiabortion efforts we have seen. I hope they are right.

The Alabama law is one of several antiabortion state measures approved after Brett M. Kavanaugh was confirmed last year to the Supreme Court, creating a rock-solid conservative majority of justices who have opposed abortion in some manner over their careers. I have zero faith in the assurances of Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, an abortion rights advocate who voted for Kavanaugh after saying he would never vote to overturn Roe vs. Wade.

If the Supreme Court does overturn Roe, it is likely to allow states to decide whether to outlaw abortion. This will allow red states to chip away at women's autonomy.

They will be able to make life hell for many women who will become pregnant by accident, or by rape or incest, and will not have the money or ability to travel to abortion-friendly states.

They will also make life hell for children whose mothers, *as we all know*, should not be having babies in the first place *if they cannot afford them*.

This is the irreconcilable hypocrisy at the heart of the antiabortion movement.