

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ISSUES

The executive and legislative branches of the federal government have been “waging a war on reproductive rights.” The state of Ohio has also put numerous restrictions on these matters. Examples are: restriction on abortions, censoring of government web sites, funding of medically unsound “abstinence-only” sex education programs, and banning of funding for most embryonic stem cell research. Family planning services are under attack, even though these are an effective way to reduce abortions. As much as possible, government should be kept out of cases of reproductive rights. The decision is mainly the responsibility of the interested parties.

Recent federal government activities to restrict reproductive rights

A. Reducing access to family planning

1. On his first day in office, the 28th anniversary of Roe vs Wade, President Bush restored the Reagan-era global gag rule on international family planning assistance. (1/22/01)
2. Contraceptive coverage for federal employees was removed from federal budget. (4/9/01)
3. U.S. delegation to the U.N. Children’s Summit, led by HHS Sec Tommy Thompson, fought sexuality education and opposed condoms for HIV/AIDS prevention. (5/02)
4. U.S. State Dept. froze \$3 million in funding to World Health Organization in response to anti-choice objections to WHO’s Human Reproductive Program (10/02)
5. HHS web sites removed medically accurate information about condom effectiveness and the lack of a proven link between abortion and breast cancer. (10/02)
6. President Bush signed partial-birth abortion ban the first federal legislation since Roe vs Wade to criminalize abortion, impeding women’s health (11/5/03)
7. Bush administration withheld funding for United Nation Population Fund, for the 3rd year in a row (7/16/04). This reduced access to family planning for the poorest women of the world.
8. This administration is slow in releasing its AIDS prevention funding in Africa. The teaching of HIV prevention emphasizes abstinence and de-emphasizes condom use.

B. Redefining the legal status of the fetus

1. President Bush signed the “unborn victims of violence act” into law. Also known as “Laci and Conner’s law”, which would include “a child in utero” as a second

victim when he or she is injured or killed during commission of a violent crime against his or her mother. (HR 1997, April 1, 2004)

2. The Bush Administration adopted regulations that allow states to classify a fertilized egg as an "unborn child," eligible for coverage under the State Children's Health Insurance Program, rather than allowing coverage of pregnant women under the program. (67 FR 61956-01mOct. 2, 2002).

C. Packing the courts to overturn Roe

1. Many of President Bush's federal judge nominees, oppose Roe vs Wade in principle.
2. The most recent Supreme Court nominee, John Roberts, has made conflicting statements about RvW. While he was deputy solicitor general in the first President Bush's administration, he wrote Roe vs Wade "was wrongly decided and should be overruled." However, in 2003 he admitted the decision was "the settled law of the land" (Akron Beacon Journal 7/20/2005)

D. Replacing science with right wing ideology

1. While President Bush authorized funding for the first time for research on embryonic stem cells, he prevented federal funding from being used for research beyond the existing embryonic stem cell lines.
2. The federal budget doubled funding for "abstinence-only" sex education. (10/11/01 – \$104 million in 2004 Omnibus Budget Bill for abstinence education) [http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/?&db_id=cp108&r_n=hr792.108&sel=TOC_3531534&]
3. The 2005 budget funds "abstinence-only" sex education and marriage initiatives, and freezes funding for Title X family planning services.
4. Congressional report concluded "abstinence-only" sex education contains false and misleading information. (12/1/04)
5. Department of Justice Office on Violence against Women omits emergency contraception from rape treatment protocols. (12.3.04)

E. Refusal Clauses

1. An increasing number of pharmacists and physicians are refusing to dispense or write prescriptions for contraceptives. These professionals cite their religious, moral, ideological, and personal objections to their use. Prescription refusal can jeopardize women's reproductive health. Denying women their rights to timely access to health care is an act of discrimination that could lead to an increased number of unintended pregnancies. Ninety-five percent of American women use contraceptives at some point in their lives.
2. Many states have enacted refusal clauses. Thirty-four states refer only to abortion and 12 refer to abortion and contraception.
3. According to many professional organizations, refusal clauses can be acceptable if they provide an adequate plan for referral.

F. Pending Legislation in Ohio

1. Abortion Bans Throughout Pregnancy: OH H228 prohibits abortions throughout all stages of pregnancy without exception and prohibits state funds from being used to pay insurance coverage of abortion.
2. Abortion information: OH S66 prohibits organizations which counsel or refer women for abortion services from receiving state funds except in cases of medical emergency.
3. Insurance prohibition: OH H239 prohibits insurance coverage for abortions for government employees; requires separate policies to be purchased for insurance coverage of abortions; restricts low-income women's access to abortion (except in cases of life endangerment and in limited cases of rape or incest), and prohibits use of public employees and public facilities from providing abortion services
4. Pro-choice legislation (OH H78) improves insurance coverage for cervical cancer screening.

References:

NARAL www.prochoiceamerica.org 2005

Planned Parenthood www.plannedparenthood.org 2005