

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Reproductive Freedom Press Conference

Speakers: Dr. Barbara Goff, MD, OB/GYN (Chair UW Medicine OB/GYN); Jennifer Allen (Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates); Dr. Nariman Heshmati, MD, OB-GYN (Washington State Medical Association)

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[\[VIDEO\]](#) [\[AUDIO\]](#)

DR. BARBARA GOFF: Well, good morning and I want to welcome Senator Cantwell and my colleagues from Planned Parenthood, Jennifer Allen, and the Washington Medical Association, Dr. Heshmati. I'm Barbara Goff and I'm the chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology here at the University of Washington.

And we're here today to talk about Roe v. Wade. And last month's Supreme Court decision overturning Roe v. Wade was widely condemned by many medical organizations because the elimination of the constitutional right to an abortion will cause unnecessary harm to women to families and unnecessary deaths of pregnant individuals.

This ruling on health care justice affects the health financial stability and opportunities for many people across the country and disproportionately fall on people of color, people who are have financial toxicity, and those who can't travel to states where abortion is still is legal.

Here at UW we reaffirm our support for access to abortion as part of the full continuum of reproductive health care access for women.

Now, while the Court's decision does not affect abortion services provided in the state of Washington, we recognize that there may be implications in the region where we teach and train students from Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho. We also anticipate that patients from states outside of Washington will be seeking care because of this decision. In fact, we are already beginning to see many women traveling from these states for appointments for abortion services.

Many of our providers have expressed concern regarding the attempts to criminalize abortion and punish abortion providers. And have legitimate concerns about their own safety from people who are acting as vigilantes.

Thanks to Washington State law that protects abortion, we're able to provide comprehensive family planning services for our providers, and they have the skills to treat life threatening emergencies of pregnancy, which is really important. We also teach about abortion in our medical school, and we provide opportunities for students to receive abortion training in the state of Washington. Further, we provide training for our OB-GYN residents, our family medicine residents, and complex family planning fellows in how to perform abortions.

We anticipate trainees from other states may also request opportunities to train within the state of Washington, so that they also have the ability to gain skills to provide comprehensive and emergency care to women to practice the full scope of OB-GYN.

Also at UW, we feel very strongly that medical decisions regarding family planning and pregnancy need to be made with autonomy and with privacy between a health care provider and the individual patient, and not by legislators or lawmakers and justices who do not have a license to practice medicine.

Here at UW we take seriously our role in ensuring that patients have broad access to reproductive services and training clinicians in the provision of these essential services.

Thank you again to Senator Cantwell and our colleagues from Planned Parenthood and the State Medical Association for joining us today in support of these fundamental rights.

I now turn the podium over to our Planned Parenthood colleagues, Jennifer Allen, who will provide additional comments. Thank you.

JENNIFER ALLEN, Planned Parenthood: Thank you, Dr. Goff. And thank you, Senator Cantwell. Your leadership has meant the world. Your unwavering commitment throughout your public service.

Again, my name is Jennifer Allen. I'm the CEO of Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates. And we serve not only Washington but also Alaska, Idaho, Hawaii, Indiana, and Kentucky. So we're getting a real and close up view on what this decision means and what it looks like for patients.

Over the last week and a half, I and all of my colleagues at Planned Parenthood across the country have been devastated on behalf of the patients who are confused, who are frightened, and who aren't sure of their abortion care. I wonder if the doctors who stand at the clinical care providers who are across the country. We're seeing patients from all over the country already. We're seeing patients from Tennessee. We're seeing patients from Ohio. We're seeing patients seeking basic abortion health care access will come. As my colleague Dr. Goff said, people who are low income, people who are black, indigenous and other people of color, people living in rural areas will be the most impacted by this policy of forced birth in many hostile states.

Now, we're very lucky in Washington. Washington has a long history of standing for access to abortion care, and for standing up, standing for it with equity, assuring that someone's pregnancy decisions aren't driven by their income. That's not true across the rest of the country. And truth be told, we don't have enough access to abortion care, even here in Washington. There are people in vast swaths of the middle part of the state who are far from care who struggled to get access to health care.

All abortion providers are working hard right now to think about how to maximize care, to maximize the use of telemedicine, to maximize access. But we don't know what it will mean to our system, when that level of overwhelm is increased dramatically when abortion becomes illegal in Idaho, and many, many more patients start crossing the border for care. We don't know what it's going to mean for our system.

And truth be told this decision goes far beyond abortion. There is no mistaking the fact that the people who are ending abortion care are also out to get regular family planning care across the board. And more, as I think you can see that the Supreme Court decision invited.

We will not let them let them succeed. We are here, Planned Parenthood is here, and our colleagues in reproductive health care are here to assure that patients can get care in Washington no matter what. We were built for this moment. We never wanted to face it. But we were built for this moment. And

now is the time for Washington to continue to lead, to continue to stand for patients, patient care, and providers no matter what.

And with that, I'm pleased to turn it over to Dr. Heshmati with the Washington State Medical Association.

DR. HESHMATI: Thank you for those powerful words. I'm Dr. Heshmati. I'm an OB-GYN. And I'm also the Vice President of Washington State Medical Association. And we're fortunate that here in Washington, we've got a long history of the public supporting a woman's right to access reproductive health, including abortion, going back to referendum 29, and women seeking abortion here in Washington.

They're already starting to see women travel from as close as Idaho to as far away as Texas to receive care. These are patients who are scared, they're confused. They want to know why they can't receive the care that they need close to home, where they're at.

And while the OBGYN is here, and all the health care workers are committed to providing that care, there's worrying about what this is going to do to access, what this is going to do to for delays in care. We could see a fivefold increase in the number of reproductive age women who their closest abortion provider is right here in Washington state.

And remember, this is a health care system. That's strange, from two years of protecting the community, from the pandemic. These are physicians and health care workers that are burned out, that are tired, but they're here to do their part. They want to make sure they've got the resources to provide the care they need. They also want to make sure that both the patients who seek that care and those who provide that care are protected. They want to know that regardless of what laws are passed outside of the state of Washington, that when women travel here to receive abortion care, physicians or other health care providers provide that care that they're going to be protected. And privately, that's what they tell me that they're concerned that they don't know whether they're going to be protected. They're worried about what could happen. They want to make sure that patients seeking health care, like abortion, and people providing health care, like abortion, is not criminalized.

And so that's why we're so honored to have such a strong advocate and supporting like you, Senator Cantwell.

SENATOR CANTWELL: Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

Well thank you Dr. Goff. Thanks so much for UW for allowing us to be here today and thank you to Jennifer Allen from Planned Parenthood for your constant advocacy and leadership on this issue. And Dr. Heshmati, thank you for the Medical Association putting a bright light on the challenges providers are now facing that the Supreme Court struck down this law.

13 states have triggered laws heavily restricting or banning abortion, some which already have gone into effect now that Roe has been overruled. 13 more states are trying to act very quickly. These laws turn women, in my belief, into second class citizens when it comes to their reproductive choices and their own bodies. These laws take rights away from women that they have had for decades. This is one of the

hardest decisions anyone will ever have to make and it really should be left her and her family and her doctor, not dependent upon the state in which she lives.

That is why it is so important for all of us to speak out against a Supreme Court decision that overruled more than 50 years of standing that had become the mainstream view of Americans in their viewpoint about reproductive health. These are draconian restrictions, and we need to do everything we can to overturn them.

With these new laws restricting rights many states have concerns about our healthcare community and how they will continue to practice if in fact, those practices are challenged by patients who traveled from states where abortion has been criminalized. I recently visited Planned Parenthood in Spokane and they have already seen a 60% increase in patients coming from Idaho. And they were concerned about their health care providers, the uncertainty in the legal cases of those Idahoans traveling into Washington and the providers and what their vulnerabilities would be.

They knew as providers in the state of Washington, a new law went into effect, helping to protect our citizens and our health care individuals being pursued. But when it comes to citizens from other states arriving here, just as these health care officials have said, we are now seeing people as far away as Texas and Ohio, the question becomes, are our health care officials protected in seeing those individuals?

I can only say that our healthcare officials are doing a great job of providing reproductive choice. They should continue to provide that reproductive choice, without the concern that someone from another state an Attorney General or law enforcement officer is going to try to pursue them or their license, or in the case of vigilantes, actually target them.

That is why it is so important to stand up to these states and get clarity about those who practice medicine in Washington will also be secure, even in seeing those out of state patients. We need to provide certainty so they can provide the full range of health care services, regardless of where that patient comes from.

Today, I am sending a letter to the Department of Justice to Attorney General Merrick Garland to ask for clarity from these individual states and state laws. One, I'm asking what we need to do to better provide our health care workers here in the state of Washington. Two, what laws and other states that have been passed, put our health care workers at risk. And three, what can the Department of Justice do to help further the protection of our healthcare individuals from any kind of injustices perpetrated by vigilante groups.

We need to be clear that the states who have passed these laws that have healthcare systems are going to be impacted. They're going to see more patients as we have just heard. They are going to provide women who desperately need this care, the comfort and the knowledge that they can have these health care discussions in our state. But we need to protect our health care delivery system here in Washington State. We need to protect these individuals, and we need to stand up for these rights that have been guaranteed by the citizens of our nation.

After we hear from Attorney General Garland, we will consider pursuing national legislation, if necessary, to protect this healthcare delivery system. I asked those states who have not joined us in the effort of full reproductive choice, how could you deny protecting individual healthcare systems in states that have chosen to move forward and at protecting these rights for 50 years?

I hope that it will be clear to all my colleagues that we have this right, and these health care delivery systems deserve to be protected. I also plan when we return to take up legislation sponsored by my colleague, Senator Hirono, and many others, including myself on the Consumer Online Privacy Rights Act, which would help protect the individual data and information that individuals have about their own health care, making sure that online providers have expressed consent to collect data, and that these individuals have the right to request that data is deleted, and they have a private, right if that individual right is not fulfilled.

We know that now that there is the need for us in the federal government to protect our healthcare system and protect these women's on these important rights. I'm going to do everything I can to make sure that we are fighting for the healthcare delivery system that we all have depended on and now so many other women are also depending on too. Thank you.