

A Pro-Life Public

By Kate O'Beirne

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For over thirty years, the plain words of *Roe* and *Doe* have been distorted by the media. On the 30th anniversary of the decisions, media polls reflected the ongoing disinformation campaign. CNN asked, "Do you favor the Supreme Court ruling that women have the right to an abortion during the first three months of their pregnancy?" *The Washington Post's* poll misrepresented the 1973 decisions in the same way. Feminists translate public support for *Roe v. Wade*, which is based on the public's misunderstanding of the case, to support for their abortion-on-demand agenda.

Faye Wattleton was president of Planned Parenthood for 14 years. A beautiful black woman whose fawning media coverage included a fashion spread in *Vogue* magazine, she put an extremely attractive face on Margaret Sanger's legacy. It was Wattleton who decided that Planned Parenthood should be in the lead in promoting abortion rights. When an equally attractive and articulate pro-life black woman was willing to take her on—Kay James of the National Right to Life Committee—Faye Wattleton refused to make joint appearances with her. Wattleton's reluctance to face a well-armed opponent is understandable. Kay James would have had the better of the argument, because the facts are on her side.

In 2003, even a poll commissioned by Wattleton's new outfit, the Center for the Advancement of Women, found that 51 percent of women thought abortion either should not be allowed or should only be available in cases of rape or incest or to save the life of the mother. Another 17 percent thought abortion ought to be available but with stricter limits. Only 30 percent agreed with Faye Wattleton and her abortion absolutist

allies, which was down 4 points from two years earlier. Of the top 12 priorities for women, keeping abortion legal was second to last.

A 1999 poll by another feminist outfit, the Center for Gender Equity, found a similar 53 percent of American women favor outlawing abortion or permitting it only for cases of rape, incest, or to save the life of the mother. In fact, men typically favor abortion more than women do.

In a rare departure from its typically feminist-friendly coverage, in 2003 *The New York Times* reported on the growing number of young people with pro-life views. Their own polling found that among people from 18 to 29, only 39 percent thought abortion should be generally available, down from 48 percent ten years earlier. One young pro-lifer explained, "Myself and my classmates have never known a world in which abortion wasn't legalized. We've realized that any one of us could have been aborted."

A 2004 Wirthlin Worldwide poll found that 61 percent of those polled said abortion is "almost always bad" for women. Polls consistently show that about half of the public would ban abortion with exceptions for rape, incest, or life of the mother, which would ban about 95 percent of abortions. Another quarter of the public would ban all but first-trimester abortions.

Because less than a quarter of the public agrees with Kate Michelman, Gloria Steinem, Gloria Feldt, and their allies that abortion should be available at any time for any reason, pro-abortion activists fight to keep the issue in the courts, beyond the reach of the public's pro-life sentiments. When she left her top post at NARAL, Kate Michelman headed to the Democratic National Committee to run a program called Campaign to Save the Court. But here too, pro-abortion feminists are at odds with public opinion.

A 2005 poll by Ayres, McHenry and Associates found that 79 percent of voters disagreed that a pro-life judicial nominee should be disqualified from serving on the Supreme Court.

Elected officials haven't been kind to the abortion-rights agenda in recent years. Kate Michelman notes, "Since 1995, states have enacted nearly 400 restrictions on a woman's right to choose." Gloria Feldt laments that the White House and both chambers of Congress are controlled by "anti-choice politicians." So too are the majority of governorships, and "the state legislatures are overwhelmingly anti-choice." These abortion absolutists seem to believe that some strange alchemy has handed such a political advantage to pro-life politicians given their constant claims that their abortion-on-demand agenda enjoys the broad support of voters.

When the question has been asked of voters, polls show the pro-life advantage is unequivocal in the voting booth. A 1996 Wirthlin exit poll found that among voters who listed abortion as one of their top two issues 45 percent voted for Bob Dole and 35 percent for Bill Clinton. A *Los Angeles Times* poll found even a bigger advantage for Dole among women who voted on the abortion issue. In 1994, among single-issue abortion voters, the pro-life advantage was 2 to 1.

Following the election in November 2004, Kristin Day, the executive director of Democrats for Life of America, explained how her party had been damaged by abortion-rights forces. She stated, "For the past 25 years, pro-life Democrats have been leaving the party over the issue of abortion." Day pointed out that 25 years ago, when Democrats held a 292-seat majority in the House, 125 of those seats were held by pro-life Democrats.

Feminists' unyielding support for this "women's issue" that doesn't have the support of women puts them at odds with the large majority of Americans who support recent protections for unborn children, like the ban on partial-birth abortions.

Feminists vehemently defend the hideous procedure its opponents descriptively call “partial-birth abortion.” A federal judge considering the constitutionality of a ban on the procedure described it as a “gruesome, brutal, barbaric, and uncivilized medical procedure—the fetus’s arms and legs have been delivered outside the uterus while the fetus is still alive. With the fetus’s head lodged in the cervix, the physician punctures the skull with scissors or crushes the head with forceps.”

President Clinton vetoed bans on partial-birth abortion that passed Congress with bipartisan majorities. In 1996, I had the pleasure of appearing as a guest on CNN’s “Crossfire” with Eleanor Smeal, who was there to defend the indefensible.

The co-hosts asked us about the political fallout from the president’s opposition to the ban. Smeal warned that the gender gap threatened anyone who doesn’t allow this gruesome procedure, and I pointed out that 64 percent of women supported the ban. Bob Novak noted that people don’t like abortion, and Eleanor Smeal responded, “For some women it saves their lives.”

What is telling about my experience in that debate with Eleanor Smeal is that these abortion absolutists don’t openly defend their radical agenda. On the show, I freely admitted that I opposed both the partial-birth abortion procedure and other methods of abortion.

Just as Smeal was only willing to defend a procedure as allegedly life-saving for the mother, in an editorial urging the election of John Kerry, Kate Michelman also deceptively avoided making the case for abortion on demand. “If you are raped, if you are a victim of incest or if carrying a pregnancy to term will endanger your health, it’s a decision for you—not the government—to make.” In the interest of accuracy, she might have added, “If you decide on the eve of your full-term delivery that you want to choose an abortion

instead, it's your decision and not the government's."

In fact, these feminists defend every single one of the over 40 million "choices" that have been made since *Roe v. Wade*, which itself was the product of a series of lies. Feminists at the time argued that they wanted to see "therapeutic" abortions legalized. The plaintiff in *Roe* falsely claimed she had been raped. Justice Blackmun falsely claimed that abortion had never been a common-law crime.

Feminists still lie about the incidence of back-alley abortions that served as a justification for legalization. In a celebratory column welcoming the euphemistically titled March for Women's Lives, in the spring of 2004, Ellen Goodman wrote, "After all, those of us who remember when birth control was illegal and when ten thousand American women a year died from illegal abortions don't have to imagine a world without choices." As she later had to allow, her memory was faulty. When her column prompted charges that she was repeating "propaganda" or an "urban legend," she did a little research and admitted in a later column that the claim that there were thousands of deaths in the years prior to abortion's legalization (which she hadn't bothered to check in the 30 years since *Roe v. Wade*) is false.

In 1972, the year before *Roe v. Wade*, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 39 women died of illegal or self-induced abortions. Overall improvements in prenatal and obstetrical care beginning in the 1940s saw the rate of pregnancy-related deaths from causes other than abortion drop at roughly the same rate as abortion-related deaths.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese is the Eleonore Raoul Professor of the Humanities and professor of history at Emory University. This founding director of the university's Institute for Women's Studies believes that the abortion rights agenda betrays women. She writes, "Doubtless we would benefit from more

complete studies, but we now have enough evidence to say with confidence that for the vast majority of women, abortion represents a worst-case scenario-and, too often, a confirmation of their abandonment by the father of the child and by the larger community. More often than not, girls and women have abortions because they lack the support to have their child."

Kate Michelman, Faye Wattleton, Gloria Steinem, Gloria Feldt, Eleanor Smeal, and their abortion allies have been promoting an antiwomen agenda in the name of women's liberation by waging a campaign for "choice" on behalf of women who often feel they have no choice at all.

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