

40 years after US abortion ruling, foes march on

22 January 2013, by John Hanna

Abortion opponents marked the 40th anniversary Tuesday of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling on abortion with a push for yet more restrictions after a string of state moves that narrow access to the procedure.

Abortion rights advocates have celebrated the Jan. 22, 1973, decision known as *Roe v. Wade* because it declared women have a [constitutional right](#) to abortions in some circumstances and prevented states from banning it. Opponents, many of whom equate abortion with murder, have sought to weaken that right ever since.

"It should be honored—not trying to find loopholes," said Rep. Emily Perry, a lawyer and Democrat from the Kansas City suburb of Mission who supports abortion rights. "I wish the amount of energy put into narrowing *Roe v. Wade* would be put into school funding or our budget."

Across the nation, many events were scheduled Tuesday by [advocacy groups](#) on the two sides of the debate. The National Organization for Women, for example, planned a candlelight vigil at the Supreme Court to commemorate the *Roe* ruling, which it supports. The annual March for Life, which traditionally draws several hundred thousand abortion opponents to Washington, D.C., is scheduled for Friday.

In the four decades since *Roe v. Wade*, a series of court decisions have narrowed its scope. With each decision, lawmakers in multiple states have followed up by making abortions more difficult to obtain or imposing restrictions on providers.

Many looked to Kansas, where [Republican Gov. Sam Brownback](#) has signed a series of tough, anti-abortion measures during his first two years in office. Much to the dismay of abortion-rights advocates, Kansas has been part of a wave in which states with Republican governors and Republican-controlled Legislatures enacted new

restrictions on abortion providers.

Hundreds of abortion opponents gathered in Topeka for a rally with Brownback, who has called on lawmakers to create "a culture of life" and is expected to support whatever further restrictions they approve. Kansans for Life, the most influential of the state's anti-abortion groups, plans to ask lawmakers to enact legislation ensuring that the state doesn't finance abortions even indirectly, such as through tax breaks or allowing doctors-in-training at the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City, Kansas, to perform them on the center's time. The group also wants to strengthen a state law dictating what information must be provided to abortion patients.

"There are still things we can do," Mary Kay Culp, the group's executive director, said before Tuesday's events, which also included workshops and prayer gatherings.

According to the New York-based Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive-rights think tank, 135 laws aimed in some way at restricting access to abortion were enacted in 30 states—most of them with Republican-controlled legislatures—in 2011 and 2012. More such measures already have been proposed in several states this year.

In Wyoming, for example, a pending bill would prohibit abortions after a fetal heartbeat is audible. A similar "heartbeat" bill is pending in Mississippi and one was debated but later sidetracked in Ohio last year.

In Texas, Republican Gov. Rick Perry has told lawmakers that he expects more anti-abortion laws during the 2013 session to work toward his goal "to make abortion at any stage a thing of the past." Anti-abortion activists have pledged to use every legal means possible to make obtaining abortions difficult, if not impossible, to obtain.

It's far rarer for bills strengthening access to abortion to be enacted these days, but there are some pending proposals. In their state of the state speeches this month, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo endorsed a bill that would further entrench the right to abortion in state laws, while Washington state's new governor, Jay Inslee, said he wants to enact a measure that would require insurers who cover maternity care—which Washington insurers are mandated to provide—to also pay for abortions. Both Inslee and Cuomo are Democrats.

A majority of states now impose a waiting period for patients wishing to obtain an abortion, and three-quarters require parental involvement before a minor can obtain an abortion, according to the Guttmacher Institute. Almost all allow physicians to refuse to participate in abortions. All such policies are in place in Kansas.

Kansas has three abortion clinics, all of them in the Kansas City area. An abortion rights group, Trust Women, plans to open a new clinic in Wichita in the building where the late Dr. George Tiller performed late-term procedures until he was murdered in 2009 by a man professing strong anti-abortion views. But the new clinic doesn't plan to end pregnancies as late as Tiller did—and couldn't in most cases under a 2011 state law restricting such procedures at or after the 22nd week of pregnancy.

The American Civil Liberties Union recently dropped a federal lawsuit against a state law restricting private health insurance coverage for abortions, after a judge's ruling limited the issues to be decided at trial. A challenge to state regulations specifically for [abortion](#) providers is still pending in the state's courts.

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