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TOP STORY

Overturing of Roe v. Wade prompts broad spectrum of reactions

By P.C. ROBINSON Staff Writer
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Morris Plains Councilwomen Joan Goddard, left, and Nancy Verga host a campaign kick-off event Friday, April 1.
Photo courtesy of Nancy Verga

"Infuriating." "Joy." A quote from the Book of Isaiah.

These are just some of the words used in reactions to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision Friday to overturn Roe v. Wade, the federal law that, since 1973, gave women the constitutional right to seek an abortion.

From local politicians to state and federal legislators, religious clerics and pro-choice and pro-life groups, the decision easily generated comments and emotions ranging from anger to relief to joy, with few mincing words.

"Today's decision is an outright attack on women's rights to autonomy," said Morris County Democratic Committee Chair Amalia Duarte of Mendham Township.

"As a mom of two now adult children, I know that having a child is a deeply personal decision," said Duarte, who emceed a Morristown rally attended by more than 200 people Friday night. "This is an extremist ruling that blocks women from access to safe health care.

"It's a call to action. If you are angry and upset today, get involved to support candidates who will stand up for women's freedom and right to choose," she said.

Morris Plains Council Members Joan Goddard and Nancy Verga issued a joint statement about the ruling.

"As Councilmembers, our focus is on keeping Morris Plains a safe, affordable, welcoming and economically vibrant community for our residents," the council members said.

"But as women and mothers, we feel strongly that the ruling to overturn Roe v. Wade endangers the lives, health and freedom of women in our community and across the nation. Decisions around reproductive health must be made between a woman and her doctor. If the Supreme Court revokes a right established by legal precedent nearly 50 years ago, they destroy the legitimacy of our nation's highest court and jeopardize the freedom and democracy of all Americans."

Gov. Phil Murphy called the decision "infuriating and disappointing."

"Let there be no doubt, we will ensure that every woman in New Jersey has access to an abortion and to the full range of reproductive services they deserve as a matter of right," Murphy said.

The Governor added that, while the state already codified a woman's right to an abortion, he was "prepared to take whatever action I can to secure a woman's full bodily autonomy and expand access to reproductive freedom.

"Where we can, we will act to protect the rights and privacy of any woman who comes to New Jersey from states in which their rights are now eviscerated if not entirely erased," he said.

"Unlike the United States Supreme Court, New Jersey will always stand on the side of our women. We will never stand between them and their doctors."

Meanwhile, Planned Parenthood of Northern, Central and Southern New Jersey said on its web page that, while the decision has "eliminated our federal constitutional right to abortion," health centers "will continue to provide care as best they can." in the state.

"Patients need us, and we need you. Make your tax-deductible gift today so we can continue to protect and provide care, no matter what," said the website.

'Radical'

President Joe Biden minced no words in his criticism in a Friday address.

"They didn't limit it. They simply took it away," he said of the court's doing away with the 49-year-old ruling. "That's never been done to a right so important to so many Americans.

"It's a sad day for the court and for the country."

Also weighing in were U.S. Representatives Mikie Sherrill, D-11 and Tom Malinowski, D-7.

In a blistering statement, Sherrill said the decision "is not conservative, it is radical. I had hoped against hope that the decision wouldn't be as extreme as the leaked draft. The court is rolling back a constitutional right, out of step with the majority of our country and almost 50 years of legal precedent.

"The freedom of women to control their bodies should not hinge on a state line. Women in Alabama, Texas, and Oklahoma deserve the same rights as women in New Jersey. With the end of Roe, 28 states will likely take action to prohibit abortion entirely; 13 states already have

trigger bans in place. Many of those bans contain no exemptions for rape, incest, or the health of the mother. Lives and livelihoods of women across the country are not safe.

"We are at a crisis moment in our country," Sherrill said. "I will continue to stand up against government overreach, defend reproductive freedom, and push my colleagues in the Senate to codify Roe."

In his statement, Malinowski said "The Supreme Court has made a radical decision to upend 50 years of settled law that the overwhelming majority of Americans believe should remain in place.

"This decision now allows states across the country to mandate pregnancies for victims of rape and incest, and to punish women for crossing state lines to seeking necessary health care. In much of the country, women and their doctors will face criminal prosecution for abortion services, in some cases from the moment of conception, and even when a woman's life is at risk. We will once again be living in a time when women risked their lives to obtain underground abortions.

"Fortunately in New Jersey, our legislature passed and Governor Murphy signed a law codifying Roe v. Wade earlier this year. But our daughters, sisters, loved ones and dear friends living, working, and studying in other states will now be at risk. And our law in New Jersey would be eviscerated if a future Republican majority in Congress passes a nationwide abortion ban – which Republicans tried to do repeatedly when they were in the majority before, and have already told us they will try to do again.

"That raises the stakes in this election exponentially. I support Roe v. Wade and will do everything in my power to enshrine it into federal law. We must expand the majority in both Houses of Congress willing to do the same."

'Elected'

Republicans, on the other hand, praised the court's move.

State Senate Minority leader Steve Oroho, R-Sussex/Morris and Assemblymen Parker Space and Hal Wirths, also R-Sussex/Morris all praised the court for its decision.

Oroho said the reversal "reasserted the democratic principle that elected state legislatures and the communities they represent should have the opportunity to make their own decisions on abortion without the mandates of an overbearing unelected federal judiciary."

He said he wanted to start bipartisan talks on reforming the state's abortion laws.

"I believe in the sanctity of life. I also believe in medical science. Looking at the laws governing abortion in New Jersey, I believe we should follow the most up-to-date science when determining viability and legislate accordingly," he said.

Space called the state's laws "radical and far-reaching. They ignore parental rights and allow abortion up to and on the day of birth. Today's ruling provides us with the opportunity to enact protections for unborn children."

Wirths said the court "has reasserted the primacy of the people and their elected representatives – the state Legislatures – over the unelected federal courts. This decision is a monumental step and will save many lives of unborn babies. We should reject the Governor's radical pro-abortion agenda and instead work to promote a culture of life in New Jersey."

'Not Healthcare'

Like the Republicans, religious leaders approved the ruling.

In his statement, Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, the Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Newark, said the decision "recognizes that even the most helpless and dependent human beings have a right to life and possess inherent dignity and worth.

"The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred, from conception to natural death. We must oppose the many threats to human life and dignity evident in contemporary society, including abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and capital punishment," Tobin said.

"Abortion represents a failure to recognize the sanctity of human life and promotes a culture in which human life in its most vulnerable moment is perceived as disposable. It is telling that in the public debate, the unborn child frequently disappears from the moral calculus.

"Furthermore," Tobin said, "abortion is not healthcare. It is a disastrous attempt to create a false equivalency between the taking of innocent human life and the 'reproductive health' of women in our society. It results in inhuman and lethal consequences.

"We join with Pope Francis in noting that 'it is troubling to see how simple and convenient it has become for some to deny the existence of a human life as a solution to problems that can and must be solved for both the mother and her unborn child.'

"Our Holy Father has repeatedly said that abortion is not a religious issue; it's a human rights issue."

Bishop Kevin Sweeney of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Paterson started his statement with a quote from the Book of Isaiah: "Hear me, O coastlands, listen, O distant peoples. The Lord called me from birth, from my mother's womb he gave me my name."

"Life is a gift that comes to us from God from the moment of conception. Our laws should protect the dignity and value of life at every moment from conception until natural death," said Sweeney.

"That the Supreme Court has recognized that life begins at conception is an answer to prayer and is the beginning of a process of reclaiming our society's respect for the fundamental dignity of every human person."

"Changing an unjust law does not end our commitment to open hearts to the always-hopeful gifts that accompany life through our daily care for the broken, the lost, and the marginalized," he said. "We pray that we can find a way to have a respectful dialogue here in our state and throughout the country to protect the dignity and value of every human life. We need to support women at every moment – from conception through birth and as families raise children."

'Weep'

Peter J. Thomas, chairman of The Conservative Caucus, a public policy group emphasizing grassroots activism, said "I weep today for the millions of lives lost to abortion but I am filled with joy that millions of babies may now be allowed to live. This is thanks to the courage of the Supreme Court in standing up for the law."

"Under the argument put forth by Roe supporters – the idea that the Court can't overrule its own errors – criminal defendants could be denied state-funded legal representation, newspaper editors could be arrested for advocating resistance to the draft, people could be wiretapped without a warrant, and schools could be segregated by 'race.'"

According to Thomas, "Since the Roe decision, more than 63 million babies have been killed by abortions," Thomas said, adding that "An estimated 20 million of the victims were African-Americans."