

# Vice President Pence addresses annual anti-abortion rally in Washington

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Mike Pence became the highest elected official and the first sitting US vice president to address the annual “March for Life,” which took place on Friday in Washington, DC. The marches have been an annual event for the past 44 years, protesting the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion.

Pence, a right-wing fundamentalist and long-time ally of the anti-abortion movement, spoke at the 2011 rally, when he was an Indiana congressman and before he became governor of the state. This time, as vice president, he told the marchers, numbering in the tens of thousands, “life is winning again in America.”

Among the other speakers at the rally was Kellyanne Conway, Trump’s campaign manager and now counselor in the White House. The turnout at the march was far below that at last Saturday’s Women’s March in Washington.

The opponents of abortion rights have been energized by the promises of the new Trump administration to advance their cause through legislation, executive order and the appointment of ultra-right judges to the US Supreme Court. Short of overturning the 1973 decision, they expect a raft of executive and legislative measures aimed at undermining abortion rights.

One of Trump’s first executive orders reinstated the so-called Mexico City policy, which restricts the use of American aid, provided through the US Agency for International Development, by any overseas non-governmental organization that provides abortion assistance or “promotes” abortion by discussing it in connection with family planning. This policy, so named because it was issued by Ronald Reagan in 1984 at a UN conference on world population held in the Mexican capital, has been called the “Global Gag Rule” by abortion rights advocates.

It has now been broadened significantly by Trump.

His executive order extends its reach to all US health aid around the world. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, this will multiply the effects of the restriction, and threatens organizations that provide services for HIV infection and AIDS, as well as a range of other family and women’s health services.

Trump’s stance on abortion rights—not that long ago he proclaimed himself “very pro-choice”—is one of many issues on which he has adopted politically convenient ultra-right positions without explanation. This, along with his selection of Kellyanne Conway as a top campaign adviser, and especially his selection of Pence as his vice presidential running mate, was designed to convince Christian fundamentalists and the Catholic Church hierarchy that he would defend their views, even as he appealed to broader sections of the population seeking to protest decades of deindustrialization and growing economic desperation.

The first week of the new administration has given the anti-abortion fanatics reason to celebrate. Pence was sent by Trump as a signal of administration support and far more aggressive pursuit of the anti-abortion crusade than was the case for past Republican presidents. Even Reagan and George W. Bush, while lauding the annual marches and professing support, only addressed the marchers via audio or video recording.

While repeating his pledge to nominate an extreme-right candidate for the Supreme Court seat that has remained vacant since the death of Antonin Scalia almost a year ago, he has named people who are uniformly and fanatically hostile to abortion rights to top cabinet positions deal with domestic social policy.

These include billionaire Betsy DeVos as secretary of education and Ben Carson, the retired neurosurgeon nominated as secretary of housing and urban development. Jeff Sessions, the Attorney General

nominee, once called *Roe v. Wade* one of the worst Supreme Court decisions in history, and Tom Price as secretary of health and human services and Andrew Puzder as labor secretary are also on the extreme right on abortion and other so-called social issues.

Among the pieces of legislation that may be considered by Congress and, if passed, are expected to be signed into law by Trump, are measures that would bar Planned Parenthood from receiving any federal funding, a ban on abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy, and making the Hyde Amendment, which has been attached to every federal budget for 40 years, banning federal funding for abortion, a permanent law. Abortion and family planning services have already been sharply curtailed in many parts of the country owing to punitive state legislation.



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