Texas governor defends anti-abortion law after signing restrictive voting legislation

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At a Tuesday press conference, Texas Governor Greg Abbott defended a new state law banning virtually all abortions without providing exceptions for rape victims. Abbott absurdly claimed that the law gives rape victims up to six weeks to get an abortion and therefore does not force victims to have their assailant's child.

Abbott made the comments at a press conference following his signing of a far-reaching bill that restricts how and when voters cast ballots and empowers partisan "poll watchers" to harass and intimidate both voters and election workers. Abbott was asked about forcing a rape or incest victim to carry her pregnancy to term. He gave a dishonest response, saying the law does not require that, and went on to proclaim his administration would "work tirelessly" to "eliminate all rapists."

"Obviously, it provides at least six weeks for a person to be able to get an abortion, and so, for one, it doesn't provide that," Abbott said, ignoring the fact that most women do not know they are pregnant after only six weeks. "That said…rape is a crime, and Texas will work tirelessly to make sure that we eliminate all rapists from the streets of Texas by aggressively going out and arresting them and prosecuting them and getting them off the streets."

Abbott then said Texas will provide support for sexual assault victims through state organizations, without providing any explanation.

Known as Senate Bill 8, the new state law prohibits abortions once medical professionals can detect a "fetal heartbeat"—a misleading term for an electric charge that can usually be observed around six weeks into pregnancy, before one can even speak, from a scientific standpoint, of a fetus having been formed. Such restrictions have normally been struck down for violating the 1973 US Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, but Texas's law leaves enforcement to private citizens through civil lawsuits instead of state prosecutors.

The law authorizes any individual to file a lawsuit against anyone who "aids or abets" an abortion, with the promise of a $10,000 reward and recovery of all legal costs if the lawsuit is upheld.

State abortion providers said the law will deny up to 85 percent of Texas women access to abortion care and will likely force many abortion clinics to close. Planned Parenthood and Whole Woman's Health clinics announced they would be forced to comply with the law, or else be quickly bankrupted by legal fees and penalties.

Pressure is mounting on the Biden administration and Democrats in Congress to take action against the draconian law. On Tuesday, 24 members of the House Judiciary Committee wrote Biden a letter urging him to prosecute "would-be vigilantes" attempting to turn in those violating Texas's de facto ban on abortions.

"Because the Department cannot permit the second largest state in the Nation to deprive women of their constitutional rights by outsourcing the enforcement of SB 8 to private individuals, we urge you to take legal action up to and including the criminal prosecution of would-be vigilantes attempting to use the private right of action established by that blatantly unconstitutional law," the lawmakers wrote.

Biden publicly denounced the law as "unconstitutional chaos" and directed the Justice Department to prevent its implementation. Attorney General Merrick Garland promised that the Justice Department would protect women seeking abortions but has not specified any course of action. Garland has proposed only prosecuting acts of violence against

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women trying to get an abortion. At the heart of that plan is enforcement of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act.

The law, commonly known as the FACE Act, prohibits physically obstructing access to abortion clinics by blocking entrances or threatening to use force to intimidate or interfere with someone. It also prohibits damaging property at abortion clinics and other reproductive health centers. However, Garland has not explained how its implementation would effectively combat the Texas law.

Abbott called the press conference after signing Senate Bill 1, a law that bans 24-hour voting and ballot drop boxes, makes it more difficult to vote by mail, and empowers partisan poll watchers to harass both voters and election officials. Republicans, who control both chambers of the Texas legislature, claim the law is intended to secure “election integrity” and combat voter fraud.

Abbott’s signature came after Texas Democrats failed to win any meaningful support from Democrats in Congress or the White House. Rather than amending the Senate filibuster rule to pass legislation that would protect voting rights, the Democrats in the House passed watered-down legislation that is certain to be quashed in the Senate.

Through their inaction on voting and abortion rights, the Democrats have demonstrated that they do not intend to put up any serious fight to protect the democratic rights of the people. They fear making any appeal to popular anger lest it unleash mass working class opposition to the capitalist system.

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