Democrats duck any real fight on abortion rights

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Democratic Party politicians largely dominated the protests that were held in many US cities this weekend against the impending Supreme Court decision repealing *Roe v. Wade* and abolishing abortion rights in half of the United States. But despite rhetorical pledges to "fight," the Democratic Party will do nothing to actually oppose the attack on women's democratic rights.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer is bringing legislation up for a vote this week to codify the *Roe v. Wade* decision into law, but this is an empty gesture, given that such a bill would require a 60-vote super-majority to overcome a Republican filibuster.

At least two Democrats, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Robert Casey of Pennsylvania, oppose abortion rights, and there may be others. There are only two avowedly pro-choice Republicans, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine, meaning that the bill would likely attain at most 50 votes, well short of the 60 required.

This requirement could be removed by revising the rules that allow a minority to filibuster legislation, but several Democratic senators oppose such a change, as well as all of the Republicans in the 50-50 Senate.

President Joe Biden declined last week to answer a question about whether he would support ending the filibuster in order to pass legislation maintaining abortion rights. He has previously opposed such a change in Senate rules.

Schumer did not disguise the performative character of the Senate vote, whose only purpose is to allow the Democrats to posture in the fall election campaign even as they do nothing to actually assist the tens of thousands of women who will immediately be denied access to a necessary health care service once the Supreme Court issues its ruling.

"All of America will be watching," he said in announcing the Senate vote. "Republicans will not be able to hide from the American people, and cannot hide from their role in bringing Roe to an end."

Since the draft opinion overturning *Roe v. Wade* was leaked from the Supreme Court last Monday, there has been mounting anger, particularly among young people, over this unprecedented effort to roll back a fundamental democratic right. The Women's March and the major abortion rights groups have called four regional marches for next Saturday, May 14. They are to be held in New York City, Washington D.C., Chicago and Los Angeles.

This weekend's protests were relatively small, with an estimated 4,000 in Houston, Texas, being the largest. About a thousand attended a protest in downtown Chicago, which was addressed by the billionaire Democratic governor of Illinois, J. B. Pritzker, while smaller crowds turned out in downtown Detroit, Manhattan and a number of sites in California.

The Houston turnout was significant, given that Texas enacted the most restrictive anti-abortion law in the United States last summer, banning the medical procedure after six weeks of pregnancy—before most women are even aware they are pregnant.

The enforcement mechanism is particularly provocative, authorizing any Texas citizen to file a lawsuit against abortion providers who violate the law and sue for damages, including a $10,000 award to the plaintiff. This vigilante-style provision was aimed at skirting lawsuits challenging the law as a violation of *Roe v. Wade*, since individuals and not the state government would be enforcing the law.

This loophole was embraced by the Supreme Court majority—the same five justices who apparently are preparing to overturn *Roe v. Wade* altogether—in a ruling last September allowing the Texas law to take effect, the first time such open flouting of the 1973 precedent has been permitted. It was a warning of the coming attack.

While those attending the Houston rally in Discovery

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Green, in the city's downtown, were rightfully outraged both over the Texas law and the impending Supreme Court decision, the speakers sought to channel this anger into the Democratic Party's election campaign for the fall.

The main speaker was Beto O'Rourke, the Democratic challenger to Texas Governor Greg Abbott's re-election. Others included Democratic representatives Sheila Jackson Lee and Lizzy Pannill Fletcher, and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner.

While O'Rourke made demagogic denunciations of both the Supreme Court majority and Governor Abbott, and called for defenders of women's rights to march to the polls in November for the Democratic Party, another prominent Democrat was visiting the state with a very different message.

House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn campaigned Wednesday in San Antonio on behalf of Representative Henry Cuellar, a right-wing Democrat who opposes abortion and backs maximum repressive measures on the US-Mexico border. Cuellar faces a primary runoff May 24 with Jessica Cisneros, who is backed by the Sanders wing of the Democratic Party.

Clyburn portrayed Cisneros as unelectable in South Texas, and asked reporters, "Which is more important—to have a pro-life Democrat or to have an anti-abortion Republican? Because come November, that could very well be the choice in this district."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has taken a similar position in backing anti-abortion members of the House Democratic caucus against more liberal challengers, claiming there is no "litmus test" on the issue for congressional Democrats.

She was notably dismissive of the rhetorical criticism of the Democratic Party offered by California Governor Gavin Newsom at an abortion rights rally last week. In a piece of demagogy that went further than he perhaps understood, Newsom asked, "Where the hell's my party? Where's the Democratic Party? Why aren't we standing up more firmly, more resolutely? Why aren't we calling this out?"

Republicans are winning, he continued: "This is a coordinated, concerted effort. And yes, they're winning. They are. They have been. Let's acknowledge that. We need to stand up. Where's the counteroffensive?"

Coming from Newsom, such a question is totally insincere. Newsom is himself the product of the Democratic machine in California, and has built his career on the support of a tightly-knit group of ultra-wealthy families in San Francisco who back identity politics but draw the line against any economic and social concessions to the working class.

Any genuine defense of the right to abortion must start from the reality that this is a class issue. Wealthy and upper-middle class women will always be able to obtain an abortion, regardless of its legal status in many states, or even in the country as a whole. Abortion will be illegal in at least 26 states once the Supreme Court issues its ruling, but the impact will fall nearly exclusively on working class women who do not have the resources to travel to another state.

Pelosi comes from the same social milieu as Newsom—her husband is a wealthy San Francisco real estate investor worth an estimated $100 million or more. Asked Sunday on the CBS program "Face the Nation" about Newsom's comments, she practically curled her lip. "I have no idea why anybody would make that statement, unless they were unaware of the fight that has been going on," she said.

She went on to claim that the Democratic Party had been fighting for abortion rights for decades, although admitting that in 2009, the last time the Democrats controlled the White House and both houses of Congress, they did not pass legislation to codify *Roe v. Wade* because of opposition to abortion within the party itself. Pelosi concluded by throwing up her hands and exclaiming, "let's just be prayerful about this."

The apparently semi-senile Pelosi leads the congressional representatives of a fully senile American liberalism, which cannot muster the energy to defend the gains of the last gasp of liberal reform policies in the 1960s and 1970s. The defense of abortion rights, and all democratic rights, can go forward only through the political mobilization of the working class, independently of the Democrats and capitalist politics as a whole, on the basis of a socialist program.

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