

The nightmarish reality of post-*Roe* America

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In the weeks after six unelected Supreme Court justices abolished the right to abortion by overturning *Roe v. Wade*, a nightmarish reality is coming into focus.

In state after state, Republican states are enacting extreme measures, rolling back the clock by many decades. State legislatures are restricting residents from traveling to obtain abortions or pills like Plan B, including by penalizing doctors who prescribe such pills to patients who live across state lines. Several states are introducing legislation that will jail individuals who travel to other states for necessary medical procedures. Texas Republicans have introduced a bill that financially incentivizes private citizens to bring lawsuits against individuals who drive family and friends to seek abortions out of state, essentially setting a bounty on them.

On Wednesday, a large section of the Republican Party in Congress endorsed the Heartbeat Protection Act, which would ban abortion in states where it remains legal. Arkansas Republican State Senator Jason Rapert, who is president of the National Association of Christian Lawmakers, said, “Many of us have supported legislation to stop human trafficking. So why is there a pass on people trafficking women in order to make money off of aborting their babies?”

The most chilling indication of the new reality is the vicious and reactionary campaign against Dr. Caitlin Bernard, an Indiana University obstetrician-gynecologist who performed an abortion on a 10-year-old girl who was impregnated after being raped. This case is a sign of what is to come.

On June 27, just three days after the Supreme Court’s ruling, a child abuse doctor in neighboring Ohio contacted Dr. Bernard to notify her that a 10-year-old patient was six weeks and three days pregnant and could not receive necessary medical treatment in Ohio. In 2019, Ohio’s Republican state legislature and

Republican governor, Mike DeWine, signed a law banning abortions after six weeks. The law does not include an exception for rape or child rape. It could not be enforced so long as *Roe v. Wade* was good law, but the restrictions went into effect hours after the Supreme Court overturned it.

As a result, the 10-year-old was forced to drive several hours to Indiana, where she received treatment from Dr. Bernard, who reported the incident to police and Indiana authorities. Dr. Bernard informed the *Indianapolis Star* about the 10-year-old’s abortion in a manner that did not violate any patient privacy laws. The newspaper published a story on July 1, and after Biden mentioned it at a press conference on July 8, the far right launched an offensive. At this point, no arrest had been made, but on July 14, a 27-year-old man was arrested in Columbus, Ohio and police claim he confessed to having raped the girl at least twice.

The Republican Party, however, has claimed that the incident was made up. Fox News declared that the story was “B.S.” Former Trump aide Kellyanne Conway appeared on the network to declare that the story was false and “too rich to verify.”

Worst of all, the *Wall Street Journal* wrote an editorial board statement on July 13 titled, “An Abortion Story Too Good to Confirm,” which attacked Biden for promoting “fanciful tales,” stating: “The tale is a potent post-*Roe* tale of woe for those who want to make abortion a voting issue this fall. One problem: There’s no evidence the girl exists.” The *Journal* then attacked Dr. Bernard by name, saying she lied for personal political gain: “You may not be surprised to learn that Dr. Bernard has a long history of abortion activism in the media.”

The Democratic Party-aligned press accommodated this far-right campaign and cast doubt on Dr. Bernard before the alleged perpetrator’s arrest was known. On July 9, the *Washington Post* published an article by

reporter Glenn Kessler attacking the *Indianapolis Star* for publishing the story on the grounds that it relied on only one source, Dr. Bernard. The *Post* implied that Dr. Bernard was less than forthright, stating that she “declined to identify to the [*Washington Post*] Fact Checker her colleague or the city where the child was located.” The *Post* wrote, “The story has acquired the status of a ‘fact’ no matter its provenance.”

Indiana State Attorney General Todd Rokita, a Republican Trump supporter, says he is investigating Dr. Bernard and may criminally prosecute her. Rokita called her “this abortion activist acting as a doctor” and falsely claimed she failed to report the incident as required under Indiana law. When it became clear that she did report the incident, Rokita continued to demonize Dr. Bernard and said he was looking into revoking her medical license, even though he has no basis for doing so.

As a result of this campaign, Dr. Bernard has faced threats of physical violence from the far right. The *New York Times* published an op-ed by a colleague of Dr. Bernard that asserts, “This saga has had real-world repercussions for Dr. Bernard. The local police have been alerted to concerns for her physical safety.”

Dr. Bernard’s life is in danger as a result of this reactionary and violent climate. In May 2009, Dr. George Tiller, a physician who performed abortions, was murdered by a far-right anti-abortion extremist at Dr. Tiller’s church in Wichita, Kansas.

The methods of right-wing terrorists have more and more become the official strategy of the Republican Party. This was expressed most clearly on January 6, 2021, when the Republican Party, led by Donald Trump, carried out a coup and attempted to overturn the results of the 2020 election by physical violence. Trump personally voiced support for protesters who intended to assassinate Vice President Mike Pence and demanded that metal detectors be removed from the rally on the Ellipse so that his supporters would be armed when they assaulted the Capitol.

The Democratic Party has refused to take action to stop the ongoing assault on democratic rights. On January 6, its congressional leaders made no appeal to the population to stop the coup from taking place, while Biden spoke and asked Trump to address the nation on television. The Democratic Party has not lifted a finger

to defend the right to abortion, with Biden and Vice President Harris repeatedly telling the population that the only solution is to vote to elect Democrats in the midterm elections, even though Democrats already control both houses of Congress.

In recent days, the Democratic Party has begun to attack proponents of abortion rights for being too critical of the Biden administration’s unwillingness to defend abortion. Biden Communications Director Kate Bedingfield told the *Washington Post* last week that “Joe Biden’s goal in responding to *Dobbs* [the name of the decision overturning *Roe*] is not to satisfy some activists who have been consistently out of step with the mainstream of the Democratic Party.”

Other leading Democrats in Congress have made similar comments attacking left-wing defenders of abortion while defending the Biden administration and demanding that voters support the Democrats in November. Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) praised Biden’s superficial assertion that Democrats should pass legislation defending the right to abortion regardless of the filibuster, a proposal which was dead on arrival due to opposition from within the Democratic Party itself. “Now we’re talking,” Ocasio-Cortez declared, lending political legitimacy to the right-wing Biden administration.

The decrepit state of American “democracy” is such that a tiny right-wing minority of religious zealots is dictating social policy in a country where 70 percent of the population supports the right to abortion. No progressive change will come from working within this rotten system. The defense of all basic democratic rights, including the defense of Dr. Bernard, requires the political mobilization of the working class against the entire capitalist political establishment. Such a movement must be bound up with the fight against the rising cost-of-living and the devastating impact of inflation, and must be developed outside of and in opposition to both parties of capitalist reaction.



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