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Texas Gov. Greg Abbott exits the stage with former President Donald Trump after a visit to an unfinished section of the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border in Pharr, Texas, June 30. (CNS/Reuters/Callaghan O'Hare)



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Pro-life groups celebrated Wednesday in Texas as "a historic and hopeful day" when a law that has the effect of barring most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy took effect. I, too, look forward to the day when most abortions in Texas and throughout the country will be no more. But I fear greatly that the premature implementation of this truly strange law will turn out to be the historic beginning of a backlash against the pro-life movement for which it is ill-prepared.

The six-week marker is important in the development of a child. It is around that time when a heartbeat can be detected. That heartbeat should strike the consciences of anyone with an open mind about the morality of the issue. The pro-choice rhetoric about not telling a woman what she can do with her body rings false when the heartbeat of another person can be detected, a person whose DNA is distinct from that of the mother, so the child is not simply "her body" any longer.

Conversely, the child is completely dependent on the mother's body at that point: It is not yet viable outside the womb. So, legally, a prohibition against abortion after six weeks is also, necessarily, a mandate that a woman provide life-support to the child.

I believe that a culture that truly values human dignity — and especially the dignity of women — would weigh those two competing moral claims, the child's right to life and the woman's right to bodily integrity, and come down on the side of supporting both persons, the mother and the child. But this is Texas.

Gov. Greg Abbott, who signed the bill into law in May, has spent most of his tenure and all of the summer demonstrating that the fetal heartbeats are the only heartbeats he cares about.

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For example, any day now, the governor is expected to sign into law a restrictive voting bill that passed through the Republican-controlled legislature. The measure aims to correct a problem, voter fraud, that does not really exist, and it will make it harder for poor people, especially poor people in urban areas, to vote.

Fifteen years ago, a former Texas governor, President George W. Bush, signed a reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act, which had passed the Congress with wide bipartisan support. How times have changed. Abbott doesn't care about the people who will find it harder, not easier, to vote next time.

Abbott has enlisted ranchers in the effort to bring criminal charges against migrants, deployed the Texas National Guard and a quarter of the State Police force to the southern counties, forcing the closure of an El Paso food bank, all in an effort to make life even harder for these desperate people who have come to America in hope of a better future, and sometimes in fear for their lives.

The governor spent much of the summer arguing against public health measures designed to protect people from COVID-19, and just last week banned mask mandates throughout the state, regardless of a person's vaccination status. How does that qualify as pro-life?

And, in what can only be termed an example of moral turpitude of the stinkiest kind, he ordered Texas state troopers to begin pulling over cars carrying migrants, and — astonishingly — cited the possibility that the migrants might have COVID-19 as a rationale for such blatant racial targeting.

This is the man who is going to champion the right to life? The human dignity of the unborn?

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The law itself is deeply problematic. It encourages citizens to sue anyone they think might have helped a woman procure an abortion after six weeks, introducing a kind of vigilante justice we had all thought consigned to old Western movies. These kinds

of "too-clever-by-half" shenanigans are an afront to the truthfulness and straightforwardness we should expect of lawmakers — and of all moral agents.

The provision was designed to get around the legal fact that *Planned Parenthood* v. *Casey*, which banned any "undue burden" on a woman's right to procure an abortion, is still the law of the land. Specifically, this potential involvement by citizens rather than state officials was designed to prevent the courts from blocking enforcement of the law in advance.

And it worked. By a vote of 5-4, the U.S. Supreme Court allowed the Texas law to take effect even though they have agreed to hear a case challenging a Mississippi statute that many observers think will be the vehicle for overturning *Casey* and its predecessor, *Roe* v. *Wade*.

Chief Justice John Roberts dissented because of the unprecedented nature of the statutory scheme, effectively delegating the state's responsibility to enforce the law. "I would grant preliminary relief to preserve the status quo ante — before the law went into effect — so that the courts may consider whether a state can avoid responsibility for its laws in such a manner," Roberts wrote.

But the majority went ahead anyway. So much for conservative jurisprudence. The majority of the court is reckless in the extreme.

The Texas law will become a footnote if, as expected, the Supreme Court overturns *Roe* and *Casey* next year. The political fight over abortion will devolve to the 50 states, and I fear the pro-choice forces will win in most of them, eventually in almost all of them.

The pro-life movement has done nothing to provide women the kinds of support they will need if abortion is to become unthinkable, and without that support, women will turn to illegal abortion providers. Even in conservative states like Texas, once women start dying in back-alley abortions, the political tide will turn. With a vengeance.

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It is actually worse than that. The pro-life movement has aligned itself with politicians like Donald Trump and Greg Abbott, men whose immorality in other areas

make them unfit champions of the pro-life cause. The pro-life movement has become an arm of the otherwise libertarian Republican Party and the corporate interests that fund it. The pro-life movement has ignored, even undermined, other threats to human life such as the threats posed by climate change, in their willful acquiescence to the Republican Party.

I am as pro-life as pro-life can be but I detest the pro-life movement, for its short-sightedness, for its moral myopia, for its viciousness.

If, instead, the pro-life movement had embraced a consistent ethic of life approach to these issues, if it had embraced a cultural approach first, knowing the politics and the law would follow, if it had vocally denounced affronts to life and human dignity when espoused by an anti-abortion politician, we might be in a better place. We might not be reliant upon legal shenanigans and morally corrupt politicians to champion the rights of the unborn. Too many ifs, too many lost opportunities.

The pro-choice movement is now energized in a way it has not been for years. In 2012, the Democratic National Convention was dubbed "abortionpalooza," but in 2020 abortion went unmentioned. Joe Biden has directed the Democratic Party away from culture war issues and toward the kind of lunch bucket issues that unite the party and have the potential to make the Democrats the majority party.

All of that work is undone. Wednesday night, after the law took effect, all the cable primetime shows began with stories about Afghanistan or other issues. MSNBC, the voice of the hard left, began each hour talking about the Texas abortion law. Rachel Maddow dedicated three-quarters of her entire hour to the issue.

The pro-life movement can enjoy its temporary celebration of its Texas victory. It can look forward to the Supreme Court overturning *Roe* next year. But it has sowed the wind and it will reap the whirlwind. I hope, how I wish, I was wrong. But I'm not.