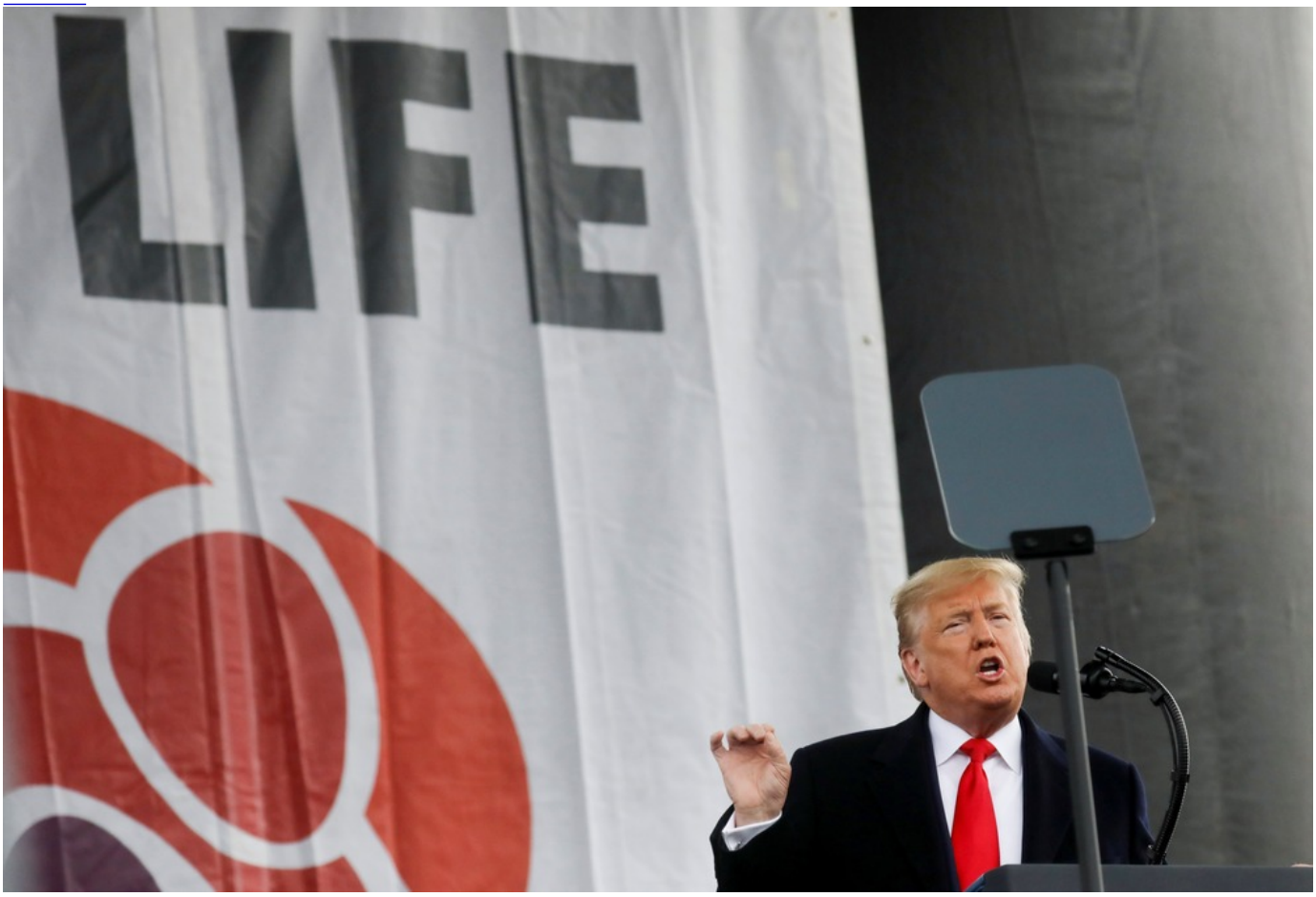
News



Then-U.S. President Donald Trump addresses thousands of pro-life supporters during the 47th annual March for Life in Washington Jan. 24, 2020. (OSV News/Leah Millis, Reuters)

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As President-elect Donald Trump prepares to return to the White House in January, activists on both sides of the abortion debate have been left to grapple with some lack of clarity from him on the issue.

During his third Republican bid for the White House, Trump argued that abortion should be a matter for the states rather than Congress, and said he would veto a federal abortion ban if one reached his desk. On several occasions, Trump has blamed the issue of abortion and pro-life voters for the Republican Party's underperformance in the 2022 midterm election cycle.

Trump also directed the Republican National Committee to remove a call for a 20-week federal abortion ban — a measure aimed at protecting just over 1% of unborn children aborted every year — from the party's platform, although his version of the platform stated the party believes the 14th Amendment "guarantees that no person can be denied Life or Liberty without Due Process, and that the States are, therefore, free to pass Laws protecting those Rights."

Meanwhile, groups that advocate for abortion access argued Trump would move to restrict the procedure, citing the Supreme Court's 2022 Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization decision that took place after Trump appointed three of the high court's justices.

In an interview that aired Dec. 8, Trump was asked by NBC News' Kristen Welker if he would restrict the availability of pills commonly used for early abortions when he is back in office. Trump said he "probably" would not.

"I'll probably — I'll probably stay with exactly what I've been saying for the last two years," Trump said. "And the answer is no."

Trump and his running mate, Vice President-elect JD Vance, said during the campaign that Trump supported access to mifepristone, a pill commonly used for first-trimester medication-based abortion, although it is also used in early

miscarriage care protocols.

But pressed by Welker if he would "commit" to that position, Trump hesitated to take a firm position.

"Well, I commit. I mean, are — things do — things change," he said. "I think they change."

"I hate to go on shows like Joe Biden, 'I'm not going to give my son a pardon. I will not under any circumstances give him a pardon.' I watched this and I always knew he was going to give him a pardon," Trump said in reference to the president's recent pardon of his son, Hunter Biden. Biden reversed his previous statement that he would not pardon his son of criminal charges, but recently changed course, citing concern about his fate under the new Trump administration.

"And so, I don't like putting myself in a position like that," Trump continued. "So things do change. But I don't think it's going to change at all."

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In the absence of national restrictions, abortion rates, which began steadily rising in 2017 after a nearly three-decade decline, have increased following the Dobbs decision. According to the Guttmacher Institute, which tracks abortion data, abortions in 2023 jumped 11% over 2020 in the "fractured abortion landscape" of the U.S., as states enact restrictions on, or protections of, abortion access.

Ryan Anderson, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, told OSV News, "The Trump administration seems to not want to be perceived as the aggressor in our abortion debates."

"There is quite a bit they can do, simply by undoing all of the bad pro-abortion actions taken by the Biden administration and returning federal policy on abortion to where it was during the first Trump administration," Anderson said.
"Returning abortion to the states, as they promised during the campaign, requires revoking every Biden abortion policy, especially when they tried to subvert state pro-life laws."

The incoming administration, he argued, could also "use the bully pulpit to shape

public opinion, by highlighting how extreme the left is on abortion, and how they are the true aggressor in the abortion culture war, and by responding to the various lies being promoted in the media about pro-life laws."

He added the administration could also "signal its support for a culture of life in ways that don't touch abortion directly, by opposing assisted suicide, for example, and promoting family policies that help mothers and fathers better care for their children."

But proponents of abortion access raised alarm at Trump's election. A statement following the outcome of the November election from Nancy Northup, president and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights, called a second Trump term "a deadly threat to the democratic values of liberty and equality, the rule of law, and reproductive health, rights, and justice in the United States and around the globe."

"Anti-rights extremists will soon be back in charge of the White House and the U.S. Senate, wielding power to the detriment of vulnerable populations and seeking to undermine decades of progress on gender equality, a linchpin of which is the ability of individuals to make decisions about their reproductive lives and have access to reproductive health care," she said, adding the group "will vigorously oppose any and all attempts to roll back progress."

Jonah Wendt, a policy adviser at Advancing American Freedom, a political advocacy group launched by former Vice President Mike Pence, told OSV News there is "room for quiet optimism" about rolling back some Biden administration policies to which pro-life advocates object, but the second Trump administration will not likely "be what it was the first time."

Many pro-life advocates, he argued, did not stage any "rebellion" to Trump's shift in position on abortion, leaving them with far less leverage as his new administration takes shape.

"You have very little leverage, but you're also ... not dead," Wendt said, arguing that the second Trump administration should pardon some individuals he said were improperly prosecuted under the Federal Access to Clinic Entrances Act, or FACE Act, which prohibits actions including obstructing the entrance to an abortion clinic. Another item he argued could be rolled back is a Pentagon abortion policy allowing service members to be reimbursed for travel costs associated with getting an abortion.

However, Pence recently urged the Senate to reject Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a Catholic and scion of the famous Kennedy political clan, as Trump's pick for secretary of Health and Human Services due to his views supporting legal abortion. Advancing American Freedom previously circulated a memo about Kennedy calling several of his policy positions, including those on abortion, as "antithetical to conservatism."

"Personnel is policy, and my hope is that your pro-life foot soldiers are still able to get into the administration," Wendt said.

Inauguration Day is Jan. 20, 2025.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.