



Posted on Thu, Jan. 22, 2009

Obama urged to rethink abortion

Opponents of ending pregnancies gird for expected pro-choice actions

By JAMES ROSEN
McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — Republican lawmakers Wednesday urged President Obama to reconsider his support of legal abortions as anti-abortion activists arrived in Washington for a protest on the anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark Roe v. Wade ruling.

As many as 200,000 people were expected to join the "March for Life" to the Supreme Court building today on the 36th anniversary of the 1974 decision legalizing abortion.

Holly Gatling, executive director of South Carolina Citizens for Life, said she was among 60 members of the Catholic Diocese of Charleston who planned to participate in today's march along Constitution Avenue.

"Everyone has the right to be born," Gatling said after arriving in Washington. "We are a resistance movement of people who believe that it is wrong to kill members of our human family who are simply waiting to be born."

Anti-abortion and pro-choice groups scheduled news conferences today amid reports Obama would soon move to reverse President George W. Bush's prohibition on U.S. aid to international organizations that perform abortions or refer women to abortion clinics.

Nancy Keenan, president of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, said senior members of her group have held discussions with high-level Obama aides in recent weeks.

"The first order of business is to reverse some of the policies of George W. Bush that have harmed women not only in this country, but women around the world," Keenan said in an interview.

Douglas Johnson, legislative director of the National Right to Life Committee, said abortion opponents were girding for a series of pro-choice actions by Obama, possibly as soon as today.

"We expect the Obama administration to push a sweeping pro-abortion agenda which, if successful, would greatly increase the number of abortions," Johnson said.

Bill Burton, an Obama spokesman, said, "We're not making any announcements on that today."

Democratic sources close to Obama said the new president likely would take early action on several abortion-related matters, starting with reinstating U.S. funding for international groups providing or promoting abortions.

President Ronald Reagan first banned such funding in the 1980s. President Bill Clinton issued an executive order reversing the ban on his first day in office in January 1993, and Bush restored the prohibition early in his first term eight years later.

Rep. Bob Inglis, R-S.C., said: "Many of us have come face to face with the tragedy of abortion. ... Every life has infinite value in all of its stages."

As an Illinois state senator and during his fewer than four years in the U.S. Senate, Obama compiled a strong pro-choice voting record.

"The first thing I'd do as president is sign the Freedom of Choice Act," Obama told a national gathering of Planned Parenthood members in July 2007.

Obama added: "On this fundamental issue (of abortion rights), I will not yield."

The Freedom of Choice Act was crafted in the Senate by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., and in the House by Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-New York.

The measure would prohibit federal, state or local governments from denying or interfering with a woman's right to choose to have an abortion. It would allow women to file retroactive lawsuits claiming harm from past denials.

Despite increases in the number of pro-choice lawmakers in the 2006 and 2008 elections, Keenan said, there still aren't enough votes to pass the Freedom of Choice Act.

In the House, there are 204 anti-abortion members and 186 pro-choice members, Keenan said. About 80 senators split evenly on abortion, with the remaining 20 taking mixed positions, she said.

Oran Smith, head of the Palmetto Family Council in South Carolina, said the Freedom of Choice Act would nullify a number of strong state anti-abortion laws adopted in recent years.

The South Carolina measures:

- Require a woman to see an ultrasound image of her fetus before obtaining an abortion
- Decree that the killing of a pregnant woman must yield two murders counts
- Authorize the state to produce car license plates with the slogan, "Choose Life."

Rosen covers Washington for McClatchy Newspapers in South Carolina.

© 2009 TheState.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.thestate.com>