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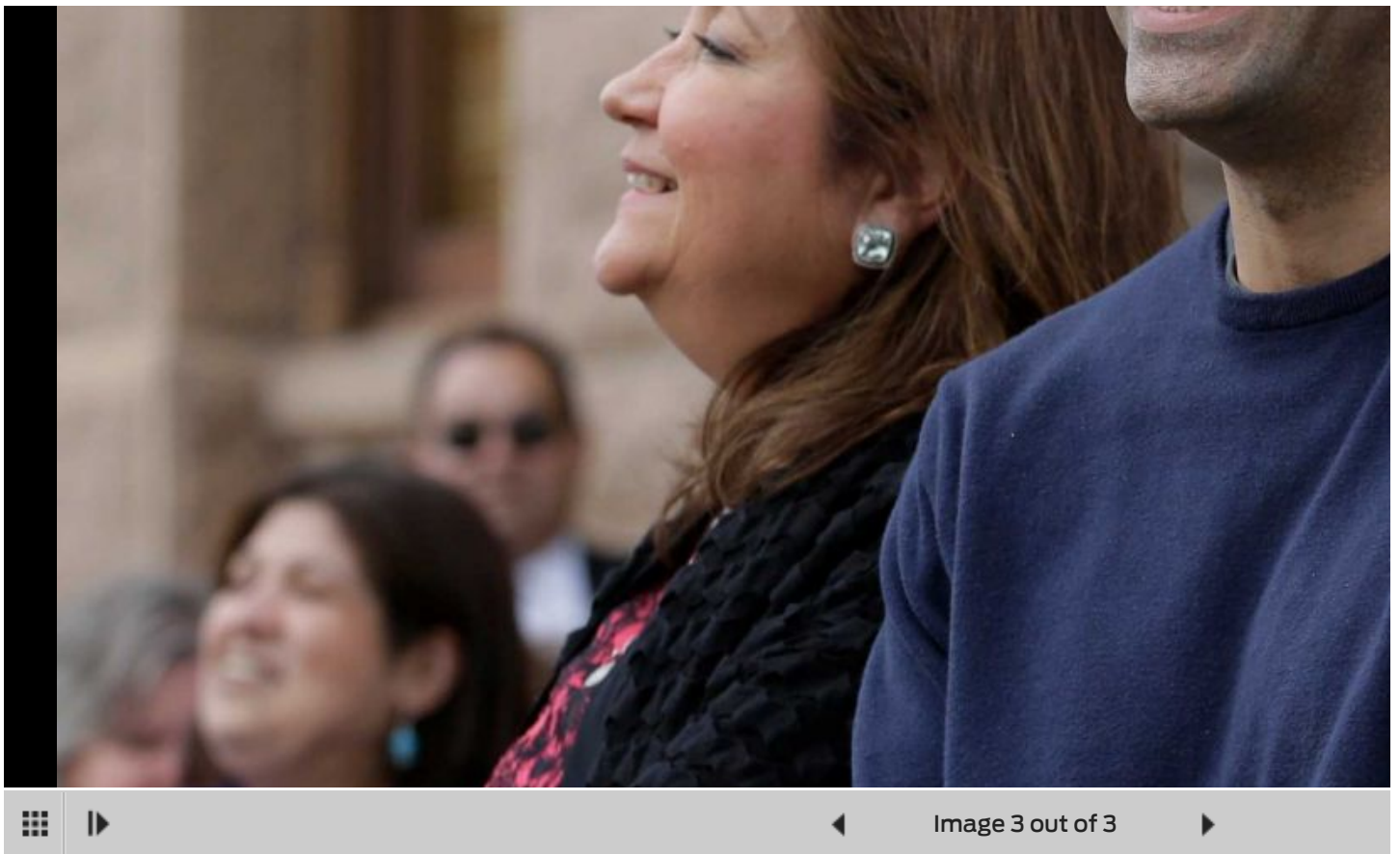
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NEWS

Abortion activists hold dueling rallies marking Roe vs. Wade anniversary

By **Brian M. Rosenthal** | January 24, 2015





Eric Gay/STF

Abortion rights supporters try to disrupt Saturday's anti-abortion march during the Texas Rally for Life in Austin.

AUSTIN - Hundreds of abortion activists rallied here Saturday in a way that symbolized the lack of dialogue in their battle: supporters on one side of the Texas Capitol and opponents on the other, with neither group doing much to engage or even acknowledge the other.

The dueling demonstrations, which unfolded over the same two mid-afternoon hours, both commemorated the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion but has remained so bitterly divisive that its meaning is still being fought in courtrooms.

On the Capitol's southern steps, a crowd estimated to include 1,500 anti-abortion activists ended a march through downtown with speeches by First Lady Cecilia Abbott, Land Commissioner George P. Bush and others. Each celebrated recent state abortion restrictions that have pushed the boundaries of the decision, and then vowed to go even

further.

Bush, the grandson and nephew of presidents - and son of a potential 2016 candidate, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush - used his first major speech since his swearing-in to call Roe v. Wade an infamous and horrendous decision that has led to a "national nightmare" of millions of unborn children being killed.

Subhed

As in past years at the annual Texas Rally for Life, the speakers talked not of limiting abortion, but of ending it.

"We in Texas will end abortion first until it expands to the nation," said Cynthia Wenz, CEO of The Source for Women, a Houston group that tells women seeking abortion about other options, to cheers from the crowd, which included several church groups and others, many carrying signs with messages such as "My generation will end abortion."

"I want it to be in my lifetime," Wenz said. "And it will."

Supporters wearing orange

Behind the pink granite building, a smaller and rowdier group of a couple hundred gathered to rally in support of the right of women to choose whether to have an abortion.

They held signs such as "Keep your rosaries off of my ovaries," "I asked God. She's pro-choice" and "Abortion: Never an easy choice. Sometimes the right choice. Always a

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woman's choice."

Many attendees wore orange, the color made famous by a June 2013 filibuster led by state Sen. Wendy Davis that briefly stalled an abortion law known as House Bill 2 that is considered one of the strictest in the United States.

"There are times when it looks like the mountain is so high for us to climb," said state Rep. Dawnna Dukes, D-Austin, referring to the tough political environment for abortion-rights supporters here. "You can't give up. You don't have the right to give up. I don't have the right to give up."

Dukes, who disclosed last fall that she once had an abortion, said women will seek the procedure regardless of the law and that making it hard to obtain will only make it more dangerous.

Looming over the rallies was the still-ongoing court battle over House Bill 2, as well as the just-started legislative session that will include more efforts to restrict abortion.

Subhed

The fate of last session's law is now in the hands of the 5th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, a New Orleans-based court that heard oral arguments earlier this month and is expected to rule within weeks.

The challenge is centered on a provision that requires abortion facilities to comply with the expensive standards of hospital-style surgical centers. The law also banned abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy, heavily regulated the use of a pill to accomplish the procedure, and required abortion doctors to obtain admitting privileges at a nearby hospital.

All but 17 of the roughly 40 abortion facilities operating in Texas before passage of the law have already closed, and another 10 could shutter if the provision on surgical center standards becomes law.

On Saturday, Cecilia Abbott mentioned the legal battle while reading to the crowd a letter from her husband, Gov. Greg Abbott, who as attorney general defended the law in court.

"It has been my honor to defend innocent life while serving as your attorney general, and protecting the unborn will always be a priority while serving as your governor," said the letter, which added that, "Texas leads the nation in defending those who do not have a voice."

In the crowd, Connie Dehoyos, 48, who drove with a church group from San Angelo, said she is hopeful that abortion will become even more rare in the state under Abbott's leadership.

"We're on the right path," said Dehoyos, watching her twin granddaughters play on a 1864 cannon on the Capitol grounds.

The girls were born out of wedlock but were a blessing to her and her daughter, making both passionate about protecting life of the unborn, Dehoyos said.

Subhed

On the other side, the attendees and speakers at the abortion-rights rally also looked to the future.

Bill and Judy Burns, who have been married for 42 years and came from Buda, in Hays County, said they were bracing for the worst in this year's legislative session.

"I assume that they're going to make it completely illegal," said Bill Burns, who described those seeking to eliminate abortion as the "Taliban of America" because "they have no respect for women."

Closer to the Capitol building, Democratic state Rep. Jessica Farrar of Houston urged attendees to get involved in the legislative process.

"We are going to need you," she said.