

THE LOCAL PICTURE

Bringing it home, Oregon alone faces 14 bills limiting women's reproductive rights, introduced by a bevy of anti-choice legislators. Among those bills is a state version of the federal so-called "Unborn Victims of Violence Act." By charging an offender who harms a pregnant woman with a separate offense for harm to the fetus, these bills create separate personhood status for the fetus.

With this legal trend, Feldt fears women's status will become secondary. "When the fetus is elevated to a status above that of the woman, Roe is moot and women's bodies become mere vessels," she says.

For example, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush recently appointed a guardian for the fetus of a profoundly developmentally disabled rape victim. "He expressed no concern for this helpless woman but took the opportunity to value her fetus above her rights, her health, her life," says Feldt.

How can the federal government get away with its agenda to undermine Roe v. Wade, a law that upholds the self-determination of the majority of the population?

Easy. The Bush administration is packing the courts to overturn Roe. George W. Bush has re-nominated both Priscilla Owen and Charles Pickering. Feldt's been following them. "Owen applied parental consent laws more aggressively than the law or court precedence required, and Pickering argued to abolish both Roe and the ERA. Nominees Carolyn Kuhl and Lavenski Smith also urge an outright reversal of Roe, while nominee James Leon Holmes served as the president of Arkansas Right to Life and declared that women should submit to their husbands."

Away from the hubbub of her whirlwind book tour, Feldt speaks even more candidly

The bill is currently sitting in the Senate, waiting to be heard. According to Eugene Planned Parenthood's Kitty Piercy, "It's not over 'til it's over."

Ballot measures are another threat to reproductive rights. Last year, the Constitution Party of Oregon filed parental consent ballot measures in seven Oregon counties (Columbia, Yamhill, Marion, Clackamas, Washington, Jackson and Polk.) So far, Columbia County, which defeated the measure, is the only county to vote on the initiative.

Oregon Right to Life has filed a 24-hour delay measure and is threatening to put it on the ballot in 2004. This measure is nearly identical to HB 2547, which Gov. Kulongoski has said he will veto if it passes the Senate. The outcome may be different if left to the voters.

Meanwhile, like women across the country, Oregonians have an access problem. Currently, 78 percent of Oregon counties do not have an abortion provider. "This creates huge barriers for low-income women, women with children, and working women, who must travel great distances to a service provider," says Portland Planned Parenthood's Nancy Bennett.

While the Portland (known as the Columbia/Willamette) Planned Parenthood office provides abortion services in all of its seven clinics, including Salem and Bend, Eugene's Planned Parenthood does not. All Women's Health Center provided Eugeneans with abortion access, but that clinic closed down last July. Currently, Eugene has four abortion providers in addition to the gynecologists who will terminate pregnancies for their clients. (Eugene's abortion providers do not wish to have their names published due to possible repercussions.)

The closing of All Women's Health

medical abortion, training clergy members to provide free counseling on abortion and other reproductive issues, and establishing an abortion access fund to assist low-income women.

"Planned Parenthood believes that in the long run, a broad approach to decreasing demand while expanding access holds the greatest promise of achieving a vision of a time when abortion is legal, safe and rare," says Piercy.

"With all of the bills pending that could limit women's rights, Portland's Bennett feels pressure. "What all of this means for pro-choice supporters and activists is that we will continue to waste our time, money and other resources fighting legislation and ballot measures that do nothing to improve women's health and women's lives, but instead undermine their fundamental right to reproductive choice."

ABSTINENCE-ONLY EDUCATION

So far, 38 states have accepted Gag Ed dollars. But in tough economic times, the offer may look more attractive to the others, causing some to re-think their health curriculum and add it to their bottom line. Recent studies show that abstinence-only education may result in students age 15 and younger delaying sex. After that age, there is no statistical difference based on curriculum. But what is disturbing is the statistic that shows, among those who are taught abstinence only and receive no information on birth control, those students do not use birth control when they do become sexually active, around age 16 or 17.

Ultimately, statistics show that having access to information, as well as birth control, lowers unintended pregnancies and STI's. Planned Parenthood has had amazingly positive results with the Family

ed, being a founding member of the state's abstinence-only STARS program, the state instead adopted an abstinence-based model. That means abstinence is prioritized, but information on contraception, STI's, decisionmaking skills and other information is added. Oregon allows each school district, however, to adopt its own approach based on what its population's needs are — and many have indeed adopted the abstinence-only curriculum.

The Eugene 4J school district uses the abstinence-based model, with age-appropriate information given to children as part of the health curriculum beginning in kindergarten. "We start with talking about handwashing and not picking anything dirty up on the playground," says Nancy Johnson, who oversees 4J's health curriculum. From there, the curriculum develops as the children do. In fifth grade, the children are taught about HIV/AIDS along with drug intervention, and sexuality education begins with a lesson in human anatomy.

As students move up, components such as dating issues, responsibility and respect, and finally, information on birth control and STI's are added to the curriculum.

Just as the state adopts guidelines but leaves it up to individual school districts to adopt their own curricula, so too, does 4J allow individual schools to determine their health programs. Within each school, teachers may vary their approach, says Johnson, but "the information will be the same." For example, one teacher may feel more comfortable discussing date rape, while another may invite someone from Sexual Assault Support Services (SASS) to speak to the class. Representatives from Planned Parenthood also visit schools to teach the kids about birth control. As all classes are co-ed, the information reaches both responsible parties.

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to EW. "I've come to believe that reproductive rights are the most basic rights women have. Without that right we can't do anything else. We can't determine the rest of our lives," she says.

Feldt believes that it's "imminently possible" that Roe could get overturned. Even now, she says, it's a mere "shell" of what it used to be. And, with 86 percent of women in the U.S. without local access to abortion, much work needs to be done. "Rights are good but rights without access don't mean much," she says.

FIGHTING BACK

So far this session, the Oregon House of Representatives has held hearings on five anti-choice bills ranging from creating new informed consent procedures for abortion to outrightly banning certain abortion procedures and creating new regulations for clinics and abortion providers. In April, the House of Representatives passed HB 2547, a 24-hour delay and biased counseling bill.

Center prompted the local Planned Parenthood chapter (PPHSSO) to study the issue of abortion access for all women in Oregon. First, "the board decided to support the provision of abortion services in dispersed settings throughout the communities we serve instead of concentrating the services in one clinic," says Piercy. Next, a task force was created to 1) decrease the demand for abortion services by working to expand clinic programs, education programs and promote the availability of Emergency Contraception and 2) to increase access to abortion services by identifying and eliminating barriers to abortion.

The latter is being done by supporting existing local abortion providers, increasing the number of providers in the Eugene community, and creating a positive political climate for abortion services.

The local Planned Parenthood chapter is working on developing an abortion resources manual, promoting the use of

Planning Expansion Project (FPEP), a federally funded program that offers free birth control to anyone low income, including students. That money, coupled with local and state dollars, has resulted in up to 200 fewer teen pregnancies per year in Lane County. It offers easy access to condoms, leading to prevention of both pregnancy and disease. But chances are the federal money will be taken away and funneled into abstinence-only education.

In Oregon, although former first lady Sharon Kitzhaber was a staunch supporter of abstinence



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