The Alito Factor

Facing an uncertain future for reproductive freedom

For the second time in less than six months, and on the eve of the 33rd anniversary of Roe v. Wade, we find ourselves standing face to face with an uncertain and troubling future for reproductive rights.

The confirmation process for replacing Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor is well under way as this goes to print, and in these first few days it seems inevitable that Judge Samuel Alito will be the next member of the Supreme Court. His possible confirmation, with a clear record of opposition to constitutional protections for women's health and the right to choose, is distressing to Planned Parenthood because he is nominated to replace a moderate conservative who has played a pivotal role on the court in safeguarding reproductive rights.

We have heard a great deal in the media about abortion and the next Supreme Court Justice. However, the 1973 Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade addresses far more than abortion. Roe confirms privacy rights, protects women's health and expands equality for women in allowing them to determine their own reproductive destiny. Justice Harry Blackmun, the author of Roe, appropriately described it as "a step that had to be taken as we go down the road toward the full emancipation of women."

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Justice Blackmun's comments give us a stark contrast to those of Alito, who has written that some forms of birth control should be considered abortion, a view that is at odds with science and held by only the most extreme opponents of reproductive rights. He has also supported state-level restrictions that make it more difficult for women, especially poor women, to access abortion services. To top off the list, he promoted laws that would require health and disability insurers to offer policies that exclude abortion coverage.

Sitting on the bench of the Third Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals, Alito was the lone vote to uphold Pennsylvania's husband notification requirement, which would have required women of that state — even some abused women — to notify their husbands prior to obtaining an abortion. Compare that to the position taken by Justice O'Connor on the same case before the U.S. Supreme Court, when she stated, "Women do not lose their constitutionally protected liberty when they marry."

Here at home in Oregon, Planned Parenthood has been working to educate the public about Samuel Alito and the future of reproductive rights, a challenge that sometimes seems larger than we ever imagined. Just last week Planned Parenthood volunteers were on the campus of a state university encouraging passers-by to contact Sens. Wyden and Smith regarding Alito, and were asked, "What's a lito?" That may indicate we have a long way to go, but we're here for the long haul.

Planned Parenthood is participating in activities and events with coalition partners around the state to highlight the importance of the Supreme Court vacancy, while also planning for our annual evening of celebration and reflection on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade.

This year's event, being held at the Downtown Athletic Club on Jan. 21, will feature an evening of music, poetry, activism and optimism. We are optimistic that Oregon will remain a safe state where women are valued as equal members of our society, where we work together to prevent unintended pregnancies while also protecting the right to safe, legal abortion. We hope you will join us for the evening's events. For more information call 342-6042 ext. 31 or contact us at publicaffairs@pphsso.org

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Letters TO THE EDITOR

DESOLATE DOWNTOWN

Tom Connor and Dan Woolley's plan to revitalize downtown Eugene does not take into account the needs and wants of the people who live, work and shop there.

The properties owned by Connor and Woolley on the south side of West Broadway have sat empty for years, adding to the desolation and crime downtown. They propose that the city buy the properties on the north side of West Broadway owned by Betty Snowden and Lazar Makyadath and tear them down. If the owners won't sell, the city could go so far as to condemn the properties and force the owners out. These buildings house many businesses, shops and nightclubs. Lazar's Bazar, John Henry's and Glamour Girl have been operating in their locations for years. Recently, Jameson's Bar opened in the former Café Paradiso spot and the owner has done a beautiful renovation job. Behind Lazar's, another new nightspot was just opened by the owners of Ring of Fire and Café Lucky Noodle. These are thriving businesses and nightspots that attract people downtown. Connor and Woolley's empty storefronts across the street do not.

Corvallis has one example of a thriving downtown. They did not need to tear down whole blocks of businesses in order to be successful. Local people are trying to open and run businesses in downtown Eugene, but Connor and Woolley have made it very difficult, by buying up large properties and keeping them empty until their deal with the city goes through. If they sincerely want to revitalize our downtown, they can build in locations that are not currently occupied, such as the gaping hole that was once Woolworth's on Willamette Street. Let's begin by building instead of tearing down.

This scheme should be seen for what it really is: a plan hatched between real estate developers and construction companies to build a bunch of buildings we don't need, fill them with chain stores, and then split town. Instead, that energy and money should be used to attract and keep the kinds of businesses we want to patronize. Let's not punish the business owners who are heroes for sticking it out through downtown's tough times.

Laura Strobel
Scott Kirkpatrick
Eugene

MYTH VS. SCIENCE

Has anyone been to the Babyfoot Lake trailhead or botanical area recently, the entrance to the world-renowned Kalmiopsis Wilderness due west of Cave Junction? Sold by the Bush administration's U.S. Forest Service to the highest bidder, these areas have been converted from treasured, old growth forests into lifeless stump fields as part of the reckless Biscuit timber sale.

Although late to reverse the damage done, it was refreshing to see the study released by OSU scientists recently that refuted the gist of the massive Biscuit timber sale. The science tells us that aggressive logging and other ground disturbing activities disrupt natural regeneration after a wildfire by literally killing the seedlings that have spouted up. The study also contradicts the myth that logging after fires helps reduce the chance of future fires, as logging operations at Biscuit left huge piles of flammable, un-merchantable timber, while the larger, more fire resistant trees were clear-cut.

This study is not too late to educate policy makers like Sen. Ron Wyden and others in Congress who will soon be voting on the so-called "Forests for Future Generations Act," sponsored by Sen. Gordon Smith. Although Smith likes to cloak himself in green on occasion, this bill will mandate post-disturbance (fire, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc.) clear-cutting on public lands with little public oversight at the taxpayers' expense. Smith should listen to the best available science, not to his campaign contributors in the old-growth logging business. And, hopefully he's learned a lesson at Biscuit that wildfire is an essential part of an old-growth forest.

If anyone is interested in an insider's perspective on the corruption behind the Biscuit