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OPINION

Roe V. Wade and the Extreme Right

Pay attention, things are about to get worse

By BEN JEALOUS

Things are about to get worse for millions of vulnerable people in our country.

It looks like the far right-wing majority on the U.S. Supreme Court is getting ready to reverse Roe v. Wade, the 50-year-old ruling that recognized a pregnant person's right to have an abortion. Abortion is legal today, but pretty soon that will no longer be the case in most of the country.

A leaked draft of a Supreme Court ruling expected to be released in June indicates that the Court will rule that there is no constitutional protection for abortion. Bans will go into effect in many states immediately, and others will follow soon. That will leave millions of women and LGBTQ people—and their spouses and partners—less free and less in control of their own health, lives and families.

Like many laws and policy decisions handed down from on high, the harm will fall hardest on those with the fewest resources and political power—people of color and low-income people. It is hard to take.

How did this happen?

In the long term, it happened because opponents on the right to choose spent decades building a movement to make it happen. They invested time and money to elect like-minded politicians. They pushed Republican presidents to fill federal courts with judges who were willing, if not eager, to restrict or ban legal access to abortion. They made it a



Ben Jealous

top priority when deciding whether and how to vote.

In the short term, it happened because Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election. To energize the Republican Party's ideological base, Trump promised them judges who would overturn Roe v. Wade. They took the deal Trump offered. They turned out to vote. And with help from Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, Trump gave them kind of judges they wanted.

And now that they have the power to impose their will, Americans' freedom will shrink and American families will suffer.

In fact, many are already suffering. Anti-choice activists have harassed and sometimes killed abortion providers. Judges have been letting state legislators pile on more and more restrictions on abortion care. As a result, in some states, the right to abortion care may exist in theory, but in reality, it is virtually nonexistent, because clinics and providers have disappeared.

There are hard times and hard decisions ahead.

There are also lessons to be learned and acted on.

One important lesson is that the Supreme Court has a big impact on our lives, even though most of us don't think about it in the day to day. We should all pay more attention.

We should pay attention when the far right tells us what they plan to do with their political power. They have been loud and clear about their intent to overturn Roe v. Wade. But many Americans refused to believe that the threat to Roe v. Wade was real. They just could not imagine a 21st Century America in which women and doctors are treated like criminals for seeking or providing abortion care.

We no longer need to imagine that kind of scenario. We're about to live it.

And that's why we also have to pay attention to the consequences of our voting behavior.

For the most part, the judges who are letting states eliminate access to abortion are the same judges letting states limit voters' access to the ballot box. They're the same judges who restrict the government's ability to regulate harmful corporate behavior. Many of them are the same judges who tried to deny millions of Americans access to health care provided by the Affordable Care Act.

The Supreme Court justices and other federal judges who are put in place by the president and U.S. Senate have jobs for life. That means we are stuck with Trump's judges for many years to come. And that means we all need to think long and hard about who we vote for—and about ever passing up the opportunity to vote.

Ben Jealous serves as president of People for the American Way and Professor of the Practice at the University of Pennsylvania.

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