

ALL THE RAGE

The Myth of the “Personally” Anti-Abortion Politician

You can't trust a politician like Joe Biden or Bernie Sanders, who either doesn't believe in a woman's right to choose or understand what's at stake, to fight to protect 'Roe.'

Jude Doyle May 23, 2019



There is no such thing as a “personally” anti-abortion politician, especially not in 2019. The past few months have seen apocalyptic news hail down on the choice front: Total abortion bans, disguised as “fetal heartbeat” legislation, have landed in Georgia, in Alabama, in Missouri, in South Carolina, in so many places that this list must necessarily be incomplete, or it would take over the article. The bills would potentially criminalize not just abortion, but miscarriage, leading to mass incarceration of women who behaved “improperly” during their pregnancies; the most restrictive ban, Alabama, permits no exceptions even in cases of rape or incest. All of these bans are intended to trigger the challenge that will overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the downfall of which is certain at this point.

We are up against the wall, and people are going to start dying. Which makes it even more infuriating than usual that the Democratic frontrunner, the person who’s likely to be entrusted to get us out of this mess, is Joe freaking Biden.

Joe Biden’s feelings on abortion are more than well known. Speaking about *Roe v. Wade* in 1974, he said that “I don’t like the Supreme Court decision on abortion. I think it went too far. I don’t think that a woman has the sole right to say what should happen to her body.” In 1982, he voted to let states overturn *Roe*. Granted, some of this occurred over 40 years ago. But, though Biden’s rhetoric has been less extreme in recent years, his beliefs have not fundamentally shifted. He faithfully backed the Hyde Amendment—which prohibits patients from receiving federally funded abortion care, and puts abortion out of reach for many working-class and poor patients—until a few weeks ago. And it was in 2015 that Biden told an interviewer that, as a practicing Catholic, he believed that “abortion is always wrong.” Though Biden claimed he wouldn’t force that belief on others, he also agreed that people who want to ban abortion should have a home within the Democratic Party: “Absolutely, positively ... and that’s been my position for as long as I’ve been engaged.”

You’re damn right it has been. That’s the problem. For decades now, Democrats and the wider left have endorsed the genteel fiction of “personal” anti-choice beliefs—a fig leaf claimed by everyone from socialist podcaster Elizabeth Bruenig to Clinton VP pick Tim Kaine—as if it were possible to separate personal belief from political principle. We have agreed to pretend that someone can believe abortion is murder, go



to a church every week where s/he hears that abortion is sinful and depraved, and then go out in the light of day and enthusiastically advocate for free abortion on demand.

It simply doesn't happen that way, and it never has. Invariably, when the chips are down, and abortion needs defending, all these "personally" anti-choice figures make the decision to "personally" not speak up. Even now, in the endgame, with Elizabeth Warren (once again) providing entire competently laid-out plans to codify *Roe* as federal law, Biden—the man who will probably get the job Warren is applying for — can't manage to do anything but hop onto a popular Twitter hashtag with a single tweet about how bans are "wrong."

Every single thing a politician does, says, or admits in public is political, even when he or she claims to be talking about "personal" belief. The fact is, if Joe Biden's anti-choice beliefs were solely relevant to Joe Biden, we would never have heard about them. He would have kept quiet and done his job of protecting abortion access. He didn't. We know, for a fact, that Joe Biden hates abortion and believes it is wrong, because he says so, frequently. His reasons are the same as any other politician's reasons for expressing any other kind of view: Joe Biden wishes to empower, embolden and attract anti-choice voters, and has likely heeded the decades' worth of messaging that ditching abortion rights is the only way for Democrats to regain white working-class men.

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It's not just a Biden problem. It was less than a week ago that Cheri Bustos, chairwoman of the DCCC, was caught hosting high-powered fundraisers for anti-choice Congressman Dan Lipinski — a man so deeply bigoted that he spoke at the March for Life about the necessity to "evangelize" anti-choice talking points among



his fellow Democrats, and whose primary challenger, Marie Newman, is backed by the Planned Parenthood Action Fund. Nancy Pelosi has publicly argued that “of course” there is room for anti-choice Democrats, and that making abortion support non-negotiable would turn the Democrats into a “rubber-stamp party.”

The left is no refuge. Leaving aside the Bruenig problem—though the prominence and popularity of anti-choice pundits within the socialist left certainly sends a clear message about that movement’s priorities—Bernie Sanders, would-be scourge of centrist Democrats and the runner-up in the race behind Biden, has also worked to elect anti-choice Democrats, as he did in his notorious decision to endorse Nebraska’s Heath Mello, and also has cast abortion as a wedge issue that alienates Democrats from his beloved base of working-class white male voters. He also faces an even more serious problem, in that he seemingly doesn’t understand what abortion is or how it works, and can therefore be tricked, easily and repeatedly, into spreading anti-choice propaganda. At his FOX News town hall, he inadvertently agreed that women were requesting abortions “at the moment of birth.” This weekend, on *Meet the Press*, he accidentally said that the country was dealing with a plague of sex-selective abortions. “Are you in all concerned, though, about this idea that people may try to worry about the sex of a child, or essentially, are those types of restrictions on abortions something you’re open to?” asked Chuck Todd. “That, I mean, that’s a concern,” replied Sanders.

It is not a concern, in fact, because it isn’t happening. Nor are women abruptly deciding on abortion while in labor with a healthy baby. I do not believe that Sanders shares the personal hatred of abortion that motivates Biden. But let’s be clear: Bernie Sanders is very good at talking about the two or three issues he actually cares about. Abortion is not on that list, and he seemingly isn’t even motivated to learn the basics.

These are the guys we’ve got to count on. These are the guys we always have counted on, for decades now; at every election, feminists showed up and voted blue, not because we trusted our representatives to further our causes or advocate for our reproductive and sexual freedoms, but because, if the Republicans won, they would destroy those freedoms. Now, with reproductive autonomy actively being destroyed, we are reaping the consequences of all the times we trusted those men. We are seeing who shows up, and who doesn’t.



The fiction of “personal” anti-choice beliefs set us up for this betrayal; in fact, it was symptomatic of how eager the party was to betray us. We don’t trust someone to be anti-fascist if they “personally” hate Jews. We can’t trust someone to be pro-choice if they “personally” hate abortion. Anti-choicers should not be coddled or mollified or brought into progressive spaces in the name of “movement-building”; they should be driven from public life, quickly and mercilessly, just as other fascists are, because their propaganda is dangerous, it is contagious, and if it becomes the rule of law, it will kill women and trans people. This is not a debate, it is a war, and we are losing.

But with that loss, the Bidens of the world are losing the only leverage they had with feminist voters. I have shown up at voting booths, for most of my adult life, with one main goal in mind: Protecting *Roe*. I have supported a lot of men I didn’t care about, in the name of making that happen. When *Roe* falls, and I can do no more to protect it, that calculus changes. Certainly, there are a lot of outrages to care about in the Trump era, and in the general, vote blue no matter who is a good idea. But we are not in the general election now. Joe Biden may be “personally” anti-choice, but I’m “personally” anti-Joe Biden. He just has to hope that I’m better than he is at keeping my “personal” feelings to myself.

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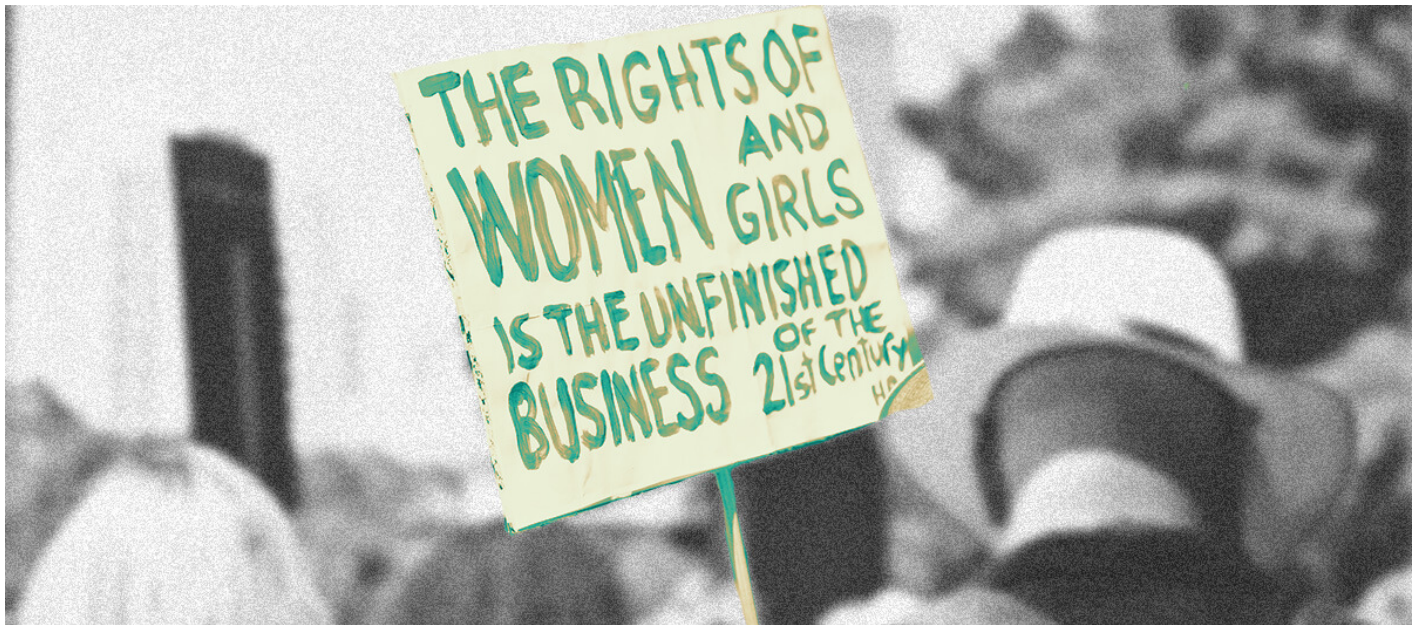
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About the Author

Jude Ellison Doyle is the author of 'Dead Blondes and Bad Mothers' (2019) and 'Trainwreck: The Women We Love to Hate, Mock, and Fear... and Why' (2016), both published by Melville House. Doyle also founded the feminist blog Tiger Beatdown, and has been a staff writer at In These Times Magazine and Rookie Magazine and contributed several pieces to the bestselling Book of Jezebel. Their work appears regularly at Elle.com, QZ, and more.



WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women Never Took Their Rights for Granted

Women have always led the fight against gender oppression. So why are we being blamed for not doing enough?



Allison Hantschel May 17, 2019

“ **A** bortion today... all of our rights as Women next ladies, so speak up now. This is not the time to be quiet!” — Lisa Rinna on Twitter

We read the statement above and a dozen others just like it through scrolling through reactions to the abortion bans passed in Georgia and Alabama. We read exhortations for more women to run for office to fight for access to abortion services, or at least oppose attempts at restriction. We read.

You know what we didn't read?

Anything that didn't subtly imply that women would have to, once again, clean up a mess we didn't make. Like clueless children scattering socks and snack wrappers strewn all over the house in total confidence that Mom will sweep and mop and tidy, the largely male overseers of our national collapse into Gilead—Alabama's abortion ban was signed into law by a female governor but written and enacted by that state's all-male Republican caucus—seem to think women should make up the entirety of the uprising to stop it.

And far too many women are reinforcing that idea.

“This bill would make women who seek abortion guilty of homicide, and subject to life in prison or the death penalty,” wrote Tina Smith, the Democratic senator from Minnesota. “It's terrifying and part of a larger, coordinated effort to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. We need to pay attention and can't take our rights for granted.”

Women did not cause the current clusterfuck by “taking our rights for granted,” and we don't get any further along in a fight we are already expected to fight alone by implying that if we'd simply been more vigilant, Republican men wouldn't have been so evil.



Women, especially lower-income women, especially women of color, have always voted in the majority for any candidate who promises to protect abortion rights. Those women do not bear sole responsibility for cleaning up after the men who are marching through statehouses burning down every legal protection women have fought and died for.

In the days following the Georgia and Alabama abortion bans, we've read statements of anger and outrage from female legislators, female journalists, female entertainers, and female public figures. All of them called out the injustice of expecting women to bear the entire burden of child-rearing without any say in how and when it happens.

“When I was growing up, people got abortions. Desperate women turned to back-alley butchers or even tried the procedure on their own,” Senator Elizabeth Warren wrote. “Some were lucky, but others weren't. They all went through hell. Access to safe, legal abortion is a constitutional RIGHT. Full stop.”

From men? Tepid statements of the kind we've grown used to hearing from politicians. “*Roe v. Wade* is settled law and should not be overturned,” said former Vice President Joe Biden. Mayor Peter Buttigieg asked his followers to donate to NARAL. Senator Bernie Sanders tried to turn the Alabama fustercluck back into a reason to support Medicare for All.

New York City Mayor Bill deBlasio, who recently announced his candidacy for president, hasn't mentioned Georgia, Alabama, or even the word “abortion” once on his prolific Twitter feed.

Male pundits, meanwhile, largely either retweeted statements made by others or kept their focus on other things: Trump's latest cruel nickname for an enemy, the ongoing machinations of the Mueller investigation, emoluments, a thousand other outrages.

Some even dared to assure women that the courts packed for decades with Republican appointees will surely interpret the law fairly and justly.



“If signed by Alabama’s governor, this law criminalizing all abortions, without exceptions for rape or incest, is too extreme to make a decision upholding an injunction against its enforcement a likely case for SCOTUS to agree to hear,” wrote Harvard Law School’s Laurence Tribe.

The bill was signed into law, and now we can look forward to justices whose interpretations of the law have already gutted critical constitutional rights like voting to make the appropriate legal decisions. Dr. Tribe will have to pardon those of us who are not exactly feeling optimistic.

Those that did speak up often did so in generic terms, or credited mothers and sisters and daughters and college girlfriends and other assorted womenfolk in their lives with opening their eyes to the idea that cisgender female bodies work a certain way, or need certain things, or suffer indignities cis male bodies do not.

Their weak sauce attempts at solidarity left women to tell their deeply personal, sometimes painful stories of abortion in hopes of inspiring sympathy among politicians who’ve already demonstrated they have none.

“Elect women. Elect Democratic women,” wrote Tariq Smith of Run for Something. “If you care about the health of women, mothers and infants. If you care about safe pregnancies and safe births.”

Let’s never say no to more female legislators, especially at the state level, especially in red states. But let’s also elect more men who give more than lip service to women’s freedom, who aren’t just allies but accomplices in women’s fights, who author legislation to expand access to birth control and childcare subsidies instead of just signing on as co-sponsors at the last minute, who stand up not just because their own wife or mother or child nags them about it but because they recognize it’s right and just that they do so.

After all, not all women are pro-choice, as we’ve seen. Alabama’s governor is a woman and she didn’t hesitate a moment before signing this bill into law. Abortion rights activists right now are mobilizing against the virulently anti-choice Wendy



Vitter, nominated by Trump to the federal bench. Vitter's supported long-debunked claims that abortion and birth control cause cancer and inspire women to seek out relationships with abusive men.

And let's not blame young women for this, either. Every third comment on every article about these bans is from an older woman victim-blaming anyone born after *Roe*—as I was—for not remaining eternally vigilant and radicalized in a fight we were told had already been won.

Let's not for once be the patient cleanup crew, enabling the destructive forces strewing these laws from sea to shining sea. Women will fight this because we have to, but we shouldn't have to fight alone.

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Allison Hantschel publishes the 13-year-old journalism and politics blog *First Draft* and is the author and editor of five books, including *IT DOESN'T END WITH US*, the story of the groundbreaking college newspaper *The Daily Cardinal*. Her work has appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, and many other publications. Follow her on Twitter: @Athenae



