

SAM KEPFIELD

Citizens should know Roe facts

As a general rule, I try to avoid writing or getting into discussions about abortion. No one is ever converted and everyone gets angry. Conversion to one point of view must be a more personal and profound experience.



But before anyone weighs in with an opinion on Roe, or goes to a candlelight vigil, read the decision itself.

taken beliefs about Roe were most likely to be hostile to the pro-life cause — not surprising, considering the media blitz conducted by pro-choicers every time the Court rules on the question.

As for the various modifications to Roe, the survey found that 84 percent supported health standards for clinics, 73 percent supported outlawing third-trimester abortions, 70 percent supported fines for illegal third-trimester abortions, 69 percent supported parental-consent laws for teens, 65 percent supported viability tests after the fifth month and 55 percent supported spousal consent.

Sixty-nine percent of the respondents disapproved of abortion as a birth control method — which is what the exceptions to Roe outlined earlier amount to. According to Planned Parenthood's Guttmacher Institute, more than 90 percent of abortions are performed for this reason.

However, the survey found a paradox — that most Americans were willing to allow such abortions. The survey found that there is no neat dividing line between pro-life and pro-choice as depicted in the media; some may subscribe to their beliefs out of convenience and others are hesitant about them. Again, it's an excellent piece and I recommend it.

But, again, before you do anything else, read Roe, which, despite Supreme Court decisions of the last 20 years, is still the law of the land. I encourage everyone, regardless of viewpoint, to participate in the debate. But do it responsibly and rationally — two things which have long been sorely lacking of late.

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However, Jan. 22 is the 20th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade. We will, in the next few weeks, be bombarded with all manner of irresponsible and hysterical nonsense from both sides. The old dogmas of "abortion is murder" versus "right to choose" will obscure any mention of facts or attempts to discover the truth.

But before anyone weighs in with an opinion on Roe, or goes to a candlelight vigil, read the decision itself. I'll even tell you where to go — Volume 410 of the United States Reports, page 113.

What Roe did and did not say are lost in the heat of the debate on abortion. It did establish the trimester approach, with the decision on abortion left to the woman and her physician in the first three months of pregnancy. In the second trimester, the state can regulate the procedure in the name of safety. In the third trimester, it can outlaw it entirely, except when the mother's life is in danger.

Though Roe did not explicitly allow abortion on demand, stating that the decision to abort had to be weighed against state interests in the protection of the potentiality of life, it painted the means by which to trump state interests with a broad brush.

A woman can override state interests in protecting the fetus if there is, and I quote from the decision, "mental and physical health [that] may be taxed by child care." Justice Harry Blackmun concluded, "Maternity, or additional offspring, may force upon the woman a distressful life and fu-

ture." Abortion may also be legitimized due to "the distress, for all concerned, associated with the unwanted child, and there is the problem of bringing the child into a family already unable, psychologically and otherwise, to care for it."

Finally, abortion can be performed due to "the additional difficulties and continuing stigma of unwed motherhood." Murphy Brown, beware! These exceptions can be found on page 153.

But what do ordinary citizens know or think of Roe? A 1990 survey done by the Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Family Research Council and Americans United for Life — all admittedly pro-life groups — raised some questions about the legal literacy of the public. The results were summarized by James Davison Hunter in the June-July 1992 issue of First Things magazine.

Four out of 10 people didn't even know what the holding in Roe was. Those most confident in their mis-

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