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***Senator Smith writes about changing policies and attitudes towards reproductive health throughout America's history. Abortion is healthcare, and the right to an abortion must be protected in Wisconsin.***

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NEW BRUNSWICK, WI - As Americans we take pride that we live in a land of freedom and opportunity. Every July 4th we light fireworks to remind ourselves of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Juneteenth commemorates the day in 1865 that General Order No. 3 was issued, finally proclaiming the freedom of enslaved people in Texas. And on August 18th, we celebrate the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, which affirmed the right of women to vote.

This past Sunday marked the anniversary of another such occasion. On January 22nd of 1973, the United States Supreme Court passed down a decision that gave women the freedom to determine their own path when it came to pregnancy.

While we've been talking a lot about *Roe v. Wade*, particularly this week, it's one event in the long history of reproductive health in America. In fact, there was nothing particularly controversial about abortion in the early years of this country. Reproductive healthcare, including abortions, was the vocation of midwives, a profession dominated by women.

But as the medical field grew increasingly professionalized, a coalition of male doctors led a movement that resulted in many state governments outlawing abortion across the board. By 1910 abortion was banned nationwide. Abortion care was unavailable to many women, with the exception of those who could afford to travel to skirt the law.




Women's lives and careers could be transformed forever by an unexpected pregnancy. Some women died due to unsafe and unregulated abortion procedures. Layers of restrictions on the rights of women kept them in the domestic sphere.

These restrictions were based on the idea that the purpose of a woman's life was to bring forth and nurture children. Never mind any responsibility that men have when bringing new life into their families; women were expected to shoulder most of the work at home. Unpaid "women's work" was not valued at the same level as so-called "productive" labor, and often the full-time work of raising a family was taken for granted.

It wasn't until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted, prohibiting "discrimination … on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin," that women were finally officially treated by the law as equals in the workforce. During the 1960s, many states pushed to update their abortion laws.

In 1973, the *Roe* decision was handed down. Reproductive healthcare allowed women freedoms that had been the domain of only men, including the ability to pursue career outside the home.

Even then, progress was incremental and often painfully slow. In 1975, the United States

Supreme Court ruled in *Taylor v. Louisiana* that not including women in juries violated the right to be tried as a jury of your peers. In 1978, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act became federal law, making it illegal for an employer to fire an employee due to their pregnancy. The Uniform Marital Property Act of 1983 honored homemakers' valuable contributions to the family by protecting their property rights. Each of these changes built on each other, giving women greater autonomy in our society.



But now, 50 years after the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe*, an activist Supreme Court reversed the ruling. In states like Wisconsin, which have laws on the books banning abortions, this opens up doctors to prosecution for providing basic reproductive healthcare to pregnant people. This especially impacts people with limited resources, who have lost so much opportunity to control their own lives and futures.

In this week's column, I've taken you through centuries of changing policies and attitudes towards reproductive health in this country. It's been a long road getting here, and we've still got a long way to go. I know it's easy to become discouraged when circumstances set us back, but our history shows us that each victory will bring us a step closer. Reproductive freedom must be once again protected in Wisconsin and across the nation.