

Ben Wikler: Republicans' war on reproductive health is just beginning

Posted on Wednesday, Jul 27, 2022

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

This month, a far-right majority on the United States Supreme Court ruled to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, ending 50 years of protected access to safe and legal abortion. This decision comes after Republican politicians, like Ron Johnson, have waged a decades-long war on reproductive health – upending years of judicial precedent, directly contradicting the advice of countless medical professionals, and taking away rights from people across our country.

After years of trying to manipulate the system and rig the courts, the GOP has gotten exactly what it wanted. And when people across our country die because they are denied access to abortion care, the blame will lay at the feet of Republican politicians and their ultra-MAGA agenda.

Here in Wisconsin, an abortion ban that passed into law in 1849 – before the Civil War – could be enforced. This law effectively bans almost all abortions in our state, and would throw doctors in jail for doing their jobs.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

As if this dystopian siege on reproductive health care weren't enough, Republicans across our state are [gaming to push the law even further](#). As we approach the August gubernatorial primary, the Republican candidates for governor have been engaging in an all-out sprint to the right – with each candidate vying to be the most extreme and most divisive choice.

Trump-endorsed candidate Tim Michels has gladly adopted the anti-women, anti-choice rhetoric that defines the Republican Party. In recent weeks, Michels has

[doubled down](#) on his support of banning abortion even in cases of rape and incest, and has voiced his support for the legislature to make Wisconsin's 1849 abortion ban even harsher.

Make no mistake: in moments of unfathomable darkness, when survivors of rape or incest are faced with a pregnancy resulting from assault, Tim Michels said it's "not unreasonable" to force victims to give birth. The nightmare of a Michels administration does not end there - he was recently asked about "abortion pills that are being passed off as contraception"—a common right-wing way to refer to emergency contraceptives like Plan B.

Michels's [response](#)? "They'll be illegal in Wisconsin."

Michels's spokesperson, no doubt realizing just how out of step with Wisconsinites this idea would be, refused to give a clear answer to subsequent questions from reporters about whether Michels would sign legislation to ban emergency contraception. Michels himself waited nearly a week before clarifying that he was "not against contraception" - but this would seem to be at odds with his past support by Pro-Life Wisconsin, which opposes all contraception.

Rebecca Kleefisch also lives on the radical fringes of the anti-choice Republican Party and supports a total ban on abortion in Wisconsin - even in cases of [rape](#), [incest](#), or when the patient's [life is at risk](#). In a horrifying moment of callousness, Kleefisch agreed that rape victims should, "[turn lemons to lemonade](#)" if they should become pregnant after an assault. To suggest that anyone's mother, sister, or family member could and should turn such an attack into "lemonade" is shocking. Kleefisch's radical and divisive rhetoric, like her even more radical divisive policies, has no place in Wisconsin.

Whether Rebecca Kleefisch or Tim Michels wins next month's GOP gubernatorial primary, Republicans' war on reproductive health is just beginning. In a Wisconsin run by ultra-MAGA candidates, Republican politicians would ramp up their campaign to extend the power of the state into hospital rooms, OB-GYN clinics, and doctor's offices.

All of this makes the stakes in an already high-stakes election year even higher. Wisconsinites must re-elect Governor Tony Evers and Attorney General Josh Kaul as the last lines of defense to protect access to abortion care in Wisconsin.

Gov. Evers and AG Kaul will continue to be a brick wall against Republicans' attacks on health care, and will continue to defend the very simple idea that medical decisions are not political. The most intimate and personal decisions about people's lives should be made by the people themselves, in consultation with their doctors and their families - an idea supported by the [medical community](#) and a majority of our [country](#) and [state](#).

- *Wikler is chair of the Democratic Party of Wisconsin*