

Downtown Billings hosts rally in support of reproductive rights



(Dr. Claire Putman, long time servant of women)

[Paul Hamby](#) Oct 2, 2021 Billings Gazette

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Dozens of people gathered in downtown Billings on Saturday, carrying signs and speaking in solidarity with nationwide protests against restrictions to abortion access that have recently gone into effect.

Health care professionals, city officials, artists and activists walked from North Park to the Yellowstone County Courthouse lawn, where speakers tied a woman's right to an abortion under the care of a doctor to health, economic and social equity. Saturday's rally is one of several hundred throughout the nation in support of reproductive rights, which dovetail with the fifth annual Women's March.

“Unless you are in the shoes of someone who is pregnant, you have no right to say anything about that pregnancy,” said Dr. Claire Putnam, one of those gathered in Billings who specializes in women’s health.

Thousands of people [flooded into Washington D.C. on Saturday](#), the Associated Press reported, rallying in front of the White House. Protesters also congregated at the steps of the Supreme Court, which is set to decide the future of abortion rights when its next term begins Monday.

Among the cases that will be heard is one centered on a Mississippi ban on nearly all abortions past the 15th week of gestational age. The court’s ruling could undo previous decisions on *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, which have safeguarded abortion access at the national level for decades.

The majority conservative Supreme Court already ruled in September to allow a Texas law banning abortions once it’s possible to detect a heartbeat of a fetus, typically at around six weeks and well before most *women are able to know they’re pregnant*.

From 2009 through 2018, the number, rate and ratio of legal abortions in the United States dropped incrementally, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Abortion Surveillance System](#). The number of abortions reported from the participating areas reached a historic low in 2017.

In Montana, Republicans in the State Legislature passed four abortion laws that were set to take effect Oct. 1, which have been challenged with a lawsuit from Planned Parenthood of Montana. [A Yellowstone County District Court judge temporarily halted three of those laws](#) for at most 10 more days, or until he can decide on a preliminary injunction, the Montana State News Bureau reported.

The laws ban abortions after 20 weeks, require a woman to be informed of the option to view an ultrasound before an abortion, require informed consent before a drug-induced abortion and block providing the medication through the mail, the Montana State News Bureau reported.

Two Billings City Council members were among the speakers at the county courthouse rally. **Ward 1's Kendra Shaw** acknowledged the major developments nationally, but encouraged listeners to engage however they could with politics at the local and state level, either through fundraising, volunteering or running for office themselves.

Penny Ronning, of Ward 4, spoke about reproductive rights from the perspective of human trafficking. Citing a 2014 study on the physical and mental health injuries and illnesses faced by survivors of sex trafficking, she said forced abortions were an “especially disturbing trend.”

“But here’s the thing: if a trafficker denying a sex trafficking victim a right to reproductive choices is called ‘forced abortion,’ then a government denying a sex trafficking victim her right to reproductive choices must be called ‘forced pregnancy’ or ‘forced birth,’” Ronning said.

Claire Putnam, who has been practicing medicine for over two decades, told the Gazette that reproductive rights go beyond sex trafficking, rape and incest survivors.

“**Even though I consider myself pro-life** on many levels, I am also pro-abortion. In my opinion, every life should be brought forward in a healthy way, in a wanted way and in a circumstance that would give that life the best chance,” she said.