

Abortion in the USA - Cartoons

In the first cartoon, the viewer is in the position of a driver on a highway who has reached a fork in the road. They can keep on the main road or take the exit on the right. The highway goes on to cross 5 states where abortion is no longer legal, so if they want to still have access to the procedure, and to preserve women's rights, they need to take the exit. On the sign over the main road, a vulture is perched. The bird famously symbolises death. Here it can mean the metaphorical death of abortion/women's rights, but also the very real risk of death for pregnant women in those states : they may die if they decide to have an illegal abortion without the help of doctors, but also if they decide to keep their baby but something goes wrong and doctors hesitate to terminate the pregnancy for fear of getting into trouble.

The cartoon was published in 2019. At the time, *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision which guaranteed a constitutional right to abortion across the USA, had not been reversed yet. But the country was already on its path to the reversal of that historic 1973 ruling. Wilkinson, the cartoonist, was clearly warning his audience about the imminence of a dystopian future where abortion would become much less accessible, if not utterly inaccessible, in certain states.

Heng's cartoon, which was published 3 years later, shows the traditional allegory of Justice — a blindfolded woman holding a set of scales in one hand and a sword in the other. A less traditional feature of his Lady Justice is that she is pregnant. Two words are written on her belly: "Abortion ruling". That is because it was made days before the Supreme Court delivered its now famous *Dobbs* decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

Donald Trump is hugging the woman's belly, looking very pleased, and saying "My baby!" This is a clear reference to the fact that, although the *Dobbs* decision was reached during Joe Biden's presidency, it was made possible by Donald Trump, who appointed three very conservative justices to the Supreme Court (Neil Gorsuch, Bret Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett) during his term as president, to replace two conservative justices and a liberal one (Ruth Bader Ginsberg), giving conservatives a super majority (6-3) in the Court.

In the two cartoons published in 2024, Donald Trump is shown trying to confuse people about his position regarding abortion. Contrary to the 2022 version of the former president, he is now not so sure about where he should stand on this issue. In Dave Whamond's cartoon he has scribbled down illegible lines on a drawing board to explain his opinion, and on Bill Bramhall's cartoon he is represented as a common street scammer, trying to con his audience with a game of "find the lady", telling them that he has decided to "leave it up to the states of confusion". This is a reference to the *Dobbs* decision that revoked the constitutional right to abortion, leaving it up to each individual state to legislate on that matter (which is exactly what Wilkinson was warning about back in 2019). But it also refers to the fact that Donald Trump has been struggling politically with the consequences of the *Dobbs* decision: he seems unable to express a clear position about abortion, which is quite confusing for a lot of Americans.