

**Reproductive Rights Organizations Call for
“New Conversation” about Abortion**
*Alliance for Reproductive Justice, Planned Parenthood and
ACLU Mark Roe v. Wade Anniversary*

On this, the 36th Anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, we celebrate a moment of great hope and opportunity. We stand at an extraordinary historical moment for our nation: for the first time, we have elected an African-American president in an election that inspired young and old, people of all races and faiths, men and women, rich and poor. Many were moved by candidate Obama’s call for a new conversation about race, a renewed commitment to our democracy, and an agenda that aspires to reach a greater good for all. Today, we focus on the piece of that agenda that holds great promise for reproductive rights.

In the wake of President Obama’s inauguration, it is tempting to use this *Roe* anniversary to recite a litany of policies we want our new Administration to enact: from rescinding the global gag rule to restoring affordable birth control at college health centers to reversing the Bush Administration’s midnight rule allowing a broad range of health care providers to refuse basic reproductive health services. While these policy changes are important, they will remain vulnerable to the ebb and flow of politics if we do not also do our part to change the public conversation about abortion.

At a national level, and here in Alaska we have great opportunity to change the conversation. Alaska was the second of four states to legalize abortion prior to the *Roe* decision. The state engaged in meaningful and broad-based dialog about why it was important to afford women the right to make this choice. The thirty years since have brought yearly legislative attacks on reproductive freedom and decreased family planning funds. What has been the effect on sexual health in Alaska? Some of the highest Chlamydia rates in the nation, increased rates of teen births in 2006—after a steady decline, consistent abortion rates and lack of access to family planning services for many women across the state.

We know that women have abortions for many reasons. Even if we disagree on the issue of abortion, we should agree that providing reproductive health care and prevention education to all Alaskans is a priority. While all can engage in the conversation *about* abortion, the ultimate personal reproductive health decisions – amongst the most important and intimate must rest with an individual woman, and as she needs, in consultation with her family, medical provider, or spiritual advisor.

As our nation renews its commitment to building a better future, we each must be free to make profoundly personal decisions about our reproductive lives. As with all freedoms, there are limits. But a government that respects the personal integrity and dignity of its people interferes in private lives as little as possible and helps ensure that everyone has the opportunity to make these decisions responsibly.

We can continue with the politics of abortion we have known for a generation, one that has exploited Alaskans’ ambivalences and fear for political gain. Or we can begin a new

conversation at this moment of opportunity, one that recognizes that both the decision to have a child and the decision to have an abortion come from a place of profound respect for the value of life and a strong commitment to ensuring a better life for all.

Geran Tarr, Director, Alliance for Reproductive Justice

Clover Simon, Vice President for Alaska, Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest

Jeffrey Mittman, Executive Director, ACLU of Alaska