

Good morning. My name is Jessica Valenti, and since *Roe* was overturned, I've been documenting the harms caused by abortion bans in a newsletter called *Abortion, Every Day*.

I cover everything from legislation and court battles to anti-abortion strategy and language, but the topic I find myself writing about the most, I'm sorry to say, is suffering.

And while Americans know about some of the suffering caused by abortion bans, thanks to the bravery of women like Dr. Dennard, there are hundreds of other stories that go unreported.

I have spoken to a 21 year old woman in Texas who was denied an abortion even though her fetus developed without a head, and a hospital worker in South Carolina who watched a college student die after attempting to end her own pregnancy.

I get more messages than I could ever answer.

And while I could share stories that would shock and sicken you in the way I'm shocked and sickened every single day, I wanted to use my time here to stress that this incredible suffering—this cruelty that treats American women as less than human—is all by design.

Despite Republican assurances that cases like Dr. Dennard's are the result of legislative growing pains, or doctors simply not understanding the law—despite claims that their bans just need to be “tweaked” or “clarified”—I want to make clear that all of this pain and suffering was not just expected. It was planned for.

Anti-abortion lawmakers and activists would have voters believe that they had no idea this is what post-Roe America would look like.

But they had 50 years to plan for this moment, and they made that plan carefully, strategically and callously.

Every raped child forced to give birth, every cancer patient denied care, and every woman arrested after having a miscarriage was accounted for and strategized over.

But with Americans getting angrier and angrier at what abortion bans are doing to their families and communities, Republicans are desperate to hide that truth from voters.

They need us to believe that they're not the cruel extremists their laws show them to be. And they certainly don't want us to know that they planned for women's deaths in the same way they strategize over a talking point or a poll. And I mean that literally.

For months, I've been tracking a conservative campaign to sow distrust in maternal mortality numbers. Republicans know that the data is going to show that their laws kill women, and so they're preemptively claiming maternal death numbers aren't accurate.

Some states have even disbanded their maternal death review committees entirely. And because the people most likely to die are the most marginalized among us, their hope is that no one will care.

I've also documented how the anti-abortion movement laid the groundwork, over months, to blame doctors for women's deaths: as if the people working under threat of losing their license or jail time are the problem, and not the laws that prevent them from doing their jobs.

All of which is to say: when Republicans feign surprise or compassion over post-*Roe* horror stories, they are lying.

They knew that women would suffer and die as a result of their laws, they decided it was a tradeoff worth making, and everything they've done since *Roe* was overturned has been in service of hiding that fact.

Most of those lies are hiding in plain sight. When Republicans tell Americans that the national 15 week ban they're proposing is a 'reasonable middle ground', they leave out the fact that the law would force women to carry nonviable pregnancies to term.

Their 'compromise' would do to any American capable of pregnancy what Texas tried to do to Kate Cox.

And again, this isn't an oversight—it's a deliberate part of a much broader extremist strategy.

Right now, there is a quiet but well-funded campaign led by the most powerful anti-abortion groups in the country that is focused entirely on pressuring and forcing women to carry doomed pregnancies to term.

They're not only trying to do away with exceptions for nonviable pregnancies—they want to eradicate prenatal testing altogether. It's a lot

easier to force women to carry a dying fetus to term if they never get diagnosed to begin with.

When I tell people about this, the question I get asked most often is *why?* Why would anyone want to deliberately create a world where women are forced to be “walking coffins”?

It is inexplicable, until you understand that this has nothing to do with families or babies, but enforcing a worldview that says it's women's job to be pregnant and to stay pregnant, no matter what the cost or consequence.

But because Republicans don't have the bravery to admit that truth—and because they're afraid of voters, who are more pro-choice than ever—they lie.

They talk about 'compassion' because they know their laws are cruel. They use the word 'consensus' while passing bans that voters don't want. And they call Democrats 'extremists' while fighting for the right to deny women life-saving abortions in emergency rooms.

And because Republicans know that voters overwhelmingly oppose their bans, they claim to be softening on abortion by pushing one of the biggest lies in abortion politics: “exceptions.”

Again and again, Republicans deliberately propose and pass exceptions that no one will ever qualify for. The only purpose they serve is to allow extremist lawmakers to feign moderation or pretend as if they've conceded something.

And frankly, any Republican who claims exceptions are real should have to do so in front of all of the people who've been told that they don't qualify for care even as they went septic, or had their uterus removed.

They should have to defend themselves in front of women like Kate Cox and Dr. Dennard, or Brittany Watts, who wasn't just denied care when her water broke too early for her pregnancy to survive, but was arrested when she miscarried at home.

The only Republican exception that holds an iota of truth is the one about women's lives—though not in the way they think. When you look at 'life of the mother' exceptions, they all contain a caveat. And that caveat says that women whose lives are at risk can be given abortions, unless the risk is because she's suicidal.

I want to stress how telling that is. Republicans know that forcing people to be pregnant against their will make them want to kill themselves. And they enshrined, into law, that they don't care.

In a moment when we're hearing so many extreme horror stories, it can be difficult to get back to that foundational cruelty: that to force someone to be pregnant against their will, for any reason, at any point, causes profound existential harm.

Abortion is healthcare, but it is also freedom. That's why every abortion denied is a tragedy. And, increasingly, Americans understand that. They don't want the government involved in their decisions about pregnancy at any point.

The first time I came to DC was in 1992. I was 13 years old, and my mother brought me here for the pro-choice March for Women's Lives.

I remember men on the sidelines screaming at us, and I remember how confused I was over why they hated us so much.

Today, my 13 year old daughter is in the room, and it's her first time in Washington. Yet somehow, she's here with less rights than I had thirty two years ago. And I think we should be ashamed of that.

My deepest hope is that she doesn't need to follow in the steps of her mother and grandmother, and come here decades from now to defend her daughter's humanity.

Thank you for your time.