

us to do. We can have differences, no question about it, but the Senate Republicans are acting responsibly.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, next week the Supreme Court is going to hear oral arguments in *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*. This is a case that could not mean more to a woman's ability to exercise her constitutionally protected health care rights. As this case now moves forward, I want to take a few minutes today to explain how much is at stake and why it is so critical that Texas's extreme anti-abortion law be treated as exactly what it is: unconstitutional.

Madam President, in Texas and across the country, extreme rightwing conservatives continue to try and turn back the clock on American women. Just yesterday, the Fifth Circuit allowed a Louisiana law to go into effect. That law would leave women with only one health center where they can exercise their reproductive rights.

This debate is frustrating, it is disappointing, and, frankly, it is appalling that in the 21st century—43 years since the historic ruling in *Roe v. Wade*—we even have to have a discussion about whether a woman has the right to make her own decisions about her own body. But one thing that has always kept me going is seeing that when their health and their rights and their opportunities are at stake, women stand up and make it clear why reproductive freedom is so important.

As we have fought back against Texas's extreme anti-abortion law, women have explained that because they were able to plan when they had children, they were able to escape abusive relationships. They have told us that because they had control over their own bodies, they were able to break cycles of poverty generations long and give back to their communities. They have shared their experiences of making the extraordinarily difficult decision to end a pregnancy out of medical necessity. These are powerful stories about the difference self-determination makes for women. These stories are possible because of constitutional rights affirmed in *Roe v. Wade* and protected in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*.

If Texas's extreme anti-abortion law stands, three-quarters of clinics in the State are expected to shut down—three-quarters of them. As a result, 900,000 women of childbearing age in Texas will have to drive as far as 300 miles round trip just to get the care they need. And women in States with laws like Texas will face similar barriers.

I believe strongly that a right means nothing without the ability to exercise that right. Laws like those in Texas and Louisiana, which are driven by ex-

treme conservative efforts to undermine women's access to care, are, without question, getting in between women and their constitutional rights, especially the rights of women who cannot afford to take off work and drive hundreds of miles when they need health care.

Put simply: Texas's extreme anti-abortion law and laws like it across the country threaten women's lives. These laws are intended to take women back to the days before *Roe v. Wade* when women had less control over their bodies and their futures.

As a mother, as a grandmother, and as a U.S. Senator, I know that is absolutely the wrong direction for our country. Our daughters and granddaughters should have more opportunity and stronger rights, not less. That is why 163 Democratic and Independent Members of the House and Senate urged the Supreme Court in an amicus brief to stand up for women's constitutionally protected health care rights. And it is the reason that even some of our Republican colleagues are focused on doing everything they can to undermine the Supreme Court.

My Democratic colleagues and I are focused on how much the Court's decision in this case will mean for women now and for generations to come. So instead of trying to obstruct justice, we are urging the Supreme Court to ensure justice by upholding settled law. For women, being able to exercise their constitutionally protected reproductive rights means health, it means freedom, and it means opportunity. We cannot and we should not go backward.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I rise today to recognize February as National Children's Dental Health Month. Since 1981, this month has afforded us the opportunity to acknowledge the importance of children's dental health, recognize the significant strides we have made and the work that remains to be done, and renew our commitment to ensuring all children in our country have access to affordable and comprehensive dental services. To echo former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, "there is no health without oral health."

Despite being largely preventable, tooth decay is the single most chronic health condition among children and adolescents in the United States. It is 5 times more common than asthma and 20 times more common than diabetes. Nearly half, 44 percent, of the children in the United States will have at least one cavity by the time they start kindergarten. Children with cavities in their primary or "baby" teeth are three times more likely to develop cavities in their permanent adult teeth, and the early loss of baby teeth can

make it harder for permanent teeth to grow in properly.

Left untreated, tooth decay can not only destroy a child's teeth, but also can have a debilitating impact on his or her health and quality of life. Tooth and gum pain can impede a child's healthy development, including the ability to learn, play, and eat nutritious foods. Recent studies have shown that children with poor oral health are nearly three times more likely to miss school due to dental pain, and children reporting recent toothaches are four times more likely to have a lower grade point average than their peers without dental pain.

Tooth decay and oral health problems also disproportionately affect children from low-income families and minority communities. According to the National Institutes of Health, approximately 80 percent of childhood dental disease is concentrated in 25 percent of the population. These children and families often face inordinately high barriers to receiving essential oral health care, and, simply put, the consequences can be devastating.

Madam President, many have heard me speak before about the tragic loss of Deamonte Driver, a 12-year-old Prince George's County resident. In 2007, Deamonte's death was particularly heartbreaking because it was entirely preventable. What started out as a toothache turned into a severe brain infection that could have been prevented by an \$80 extraction. After multiple surgeries and a lengthy hospital stay, sadly, Deamonte passed away—9 years ago today. So today we mark the ninth anniversary of his tragic death.

Since the tragic death of Deamonte in 2007, we have made significant progress in improving access to pediatric dental care in the country. For example, in 2009, Congress reauthorized the Children's Health Insurance Program—CHIP—with an important addition: a guaranteed pediatric dental benefit. Today, CHIP provides affordable comprehensive health coverage, including dental coverage, to more than 8 million children. Thanks to CHIP, we now have the highest number of children in history with medical and dental coverage. In addition, in 2010, Congress included pediatric dental services in the set of essential health benefits established under the Affordable Care Act.

I am very proud my State of Maryland has been recognized as a national leader in pediatric dental health coverage. In a 2011 Pew Center report, "The State of Children's Dental Health," Maryland earned an A and was the only State to meet seven of the eight policy benchmarks for addressing children's dental health needs.

In addition, in the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange, every qualified health plan now includes pediatric dental coverage, so families do not have to pay a separate premium for dental coverage for their children and do not have a separate deductible or out-of-