

## Extra Feature Story

### President Obama Encourages 'Civil Debate' on Abortion,

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**President Obama used his commencement address at the Catholic university Notre Dame Sunday to call for all sides in the abortion debate to treat each other with respect and search for common ground and work toward a world with fewer unexpected and unwanted pregnancies.**

While most graduating seniors attended the speech, two dozen boycotted the ceremony in protest of the president's views on abortion and stem cell research and at least 39 demonstrators were arrested on campus, mostly for trespassing.

One of those arrested, was Norma McCorvey, "Roe" in the landmark Supreme Court 1973 decision Roe v. Wade, the ruling that struck down state laws banning abortion. McCorvey is now a pro-life advocate.

#### **George Bush introduced his faith-based proposal in speech**

Inside the graduation ceremony many students cheered the president, shouting down a heckler with chants of Obama's campaign slogan, "yes we can" or Notre Dame's own cheer "we are ND."

Some seniors decided to protest silently by pasting images of the cross and small feet in on their graduation caps. Students who support the president pasted his ubiquitous campaign symbol, the O.

According to tradition, Notre Dame University has invited every president since Eisenhower in the 1950s, and six have come and received honorary degrees at the Catholic university.

The former president, George W. Bush, used the platform to present his faith-based proposals.

#### **President Obama has reversed several President Bush policies**

Abortion was made legal in the United States after the landmark decision of Roe v. Wade in 1973. The court found that under the privacy clause of the 14th Amendment, women may terminate their pregnancy until the fetus becomes viable and could potentially live outside the womb. The federal decision struck down individual state laws that had banned abortion.

While historically Democrats have been pro-choice, in recent years Democratic candidates have softened their rhetoric. President Obama has defended a woman's right to choose - but says abortion should be rare and may be restricted.

Since taking office, the president has tried to reframe the debate over abortion saying that while the two sides may fundamentally disagree "we can still agree that this is a heart-wrenching decision for any woman to make, with both moral and spiritual dimensions."

Mr. Obama has continued to send signals to both sides, having his aides meet with pro-life advocates while at the same time taking steps to ease restrictions on embryonic stem cell research and reversing a Bush administration ban on funding international groups that perform or advocate abortions.

Many Republicans, the Catholic Church and other denominations believe that abortion and the use of embryos for stem-cell research amount to the destruction of human life, are morally wrong and should be banned.

**Polls show Americans are divided on how to restrict abortions**

A Gallup poll released last week states that the number of Americans who identify as "pro-life" has increased, making it the first time since 1995, that more people identify as pro-life than pro-choice.

The increase was almost entirely amongst Republicans—who may be more concerned about abortion now that there is a pro-choice president, according to Amy Walters, a polling expert and editor-in-chief of the Hotline.

The American National Election Studies board also studies public opinion about abortion and does not ask individuals if they are "pro-life" or "pro-choice" but rather under what circumstances they think abortion should be legal. Their most recent findings state that 41 percent still believe abortion is a matter of personal choice and should be legal while only 15 percent believe abortion should never be permitted.

There is still 44 percent in the middle who may call themselves "pro-life" or "pro-choice" but who believe that abortion should be legal only under certain circumstances: when the pregnancy is the result of rape and/or incest, when it is a threat the mother's life, and/or "when the need has been established."

Steven Waldman of Beliefnet told the NewsHour that "the majority of the population is in the middle, which is to say, they want abortion to be legal, but with restrictions."

**-- Compiled by Lizzy Berryman for NewsHour Extra**

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