

Supreme Court vacancy: Culture wars just beginning



Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., joined at right by Ilyse Hogue, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., speaks as he and activists demonstrate at the Supreme Court as President Donald Trump prepares to choose a replacement for Justice Anthony Kennedy, on Capitol Hill in Washington, Thursday, June 28, 2018. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite) - The Associated Press



Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., joins activists at the Supreme Court as President Donald Trump prepares to choose a replacement for Justice Anthony Kennedy, on Capitol Hill in Washington, Thursday, June 28, 2018. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite) - The Associated Press



Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., joins activists at the Supreme Court as President Donald Trump prepares to choose a replacement for Justice Anthony Kennedy, on Capitol Hill in Washington, Thursday, June 28, 2018. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite) - The Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The Trump-era culture wars are just beginning.

The division that President Donald Trump has tapped into — and helped fuel — on issues ranging from immigration to football players kneeling during the national anthem may be a warmup for what's to come this summer as Republicans seek to fill a crucial seat on the Supreme Court.

Perhaps no hot-button issue will take center stage like abortion. Justice Anthony Kennedy often provided the pivotal vote on cases concerning abortion rights and his retirement opens the door for Trump to select someone more likely to vote with conservatives. That prospect is unfolding during a dramatic election year heralded for the number of women running for office.

Some of them, such as Democratic Senate candidate Jacky Rosen of Nevada, are framing the stakes in blunt terms in a bid to compel women to vote in November.

“We have a lot to be concerned about. Women’s rights, the right to choose, LGBT rights, voting rights, civil rights,” Rosen, challenging vulnerable Republican Sen. Dean Heller, said in an interview. “A woman’s right to choose is current law. Women have that right. They don’t want it taken away. It is pivotal.”

National Democratic groups such as the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee were slow to reopen cultural battles, wary that such a move could compromise incumbents from GOP-leaning states who will come under tremendous pressure to back Trump’s eventual nominee to succeed Kennedy. But abortion-rights groups embraced Rosen’s approach to seize on the vacancy to harness the voting power of women who oppose Trump.

Leading abortion-rights group NARAL Pro-Choice America was preparing to launch a nationwide voter-outreach program, chiefly with door-to-door canvassing targeting voters who, according to the organization’s data, are motivated by the threat to abortion rights.

“You might have had a history of the other side using courts as an issue in the past,” said NARAL President Ilyse Hogue. “But where the energy is on this is on our side. And voters are fired up.”

The potential of a new justice could prompt increased turnout from known abortion-rights supporters, such as younger voters and women, and lift a Democratic candidate who supports abortion rights in a close race, said Colorado-based Democratic pollster Paul Harstad.

“I don’t see it as a huge factor. But it may make the difference around the margins, and could very well provide a measure of energy and enthusiasm of a Democratic candidate,” said Harstad, who advised Barack Obama’s 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns.

The issue is heating up as some states place restrictions on abortion that could lead to constitutional challenges. Last month, Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds in Iowa signed legislation blocking abortions once a fetal heartbeat is detected, around the sixth week of pregnancy and often before a mother knows she’s pregnant. The American Civil Liberties Union and Planned Parenthood are suing to challenge the law under the Iowa constitution, instead of the federal constitution, to avoid being a potential target for overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

In Washington, a central question for Republican leaders is whether to vote on a Supreme Court nominee before or after the midterm elections. Doing so before November would allow the GOP to resolve the issue while they have a narrow majority in the Senate and claim victory on an issue that has motivated the party for decades. Holding a vote after the elections would give both parties the opportunity to gin up maximum voter enthusiasm going into the midterms.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said the chamber “will vote to confirm Justice Kennedy’s successor this fall.”

Abortion is one of several fronts in the culture war battles that lie ahead. Heated debates over immigration, gun rights and voting laws are also likely on the horizon. Speaking at a rally Wednesday in North Dakota, Trump painted Kennedy’s successor as a defense against Democratic lawlessness.

“Democrats want judges who will rewrite the Constitution anyway they want to do it, and take away your Second Amendment, erase borders, throw open the jailhouse doors, and destroy your freedoms,” Trump said while campaigning for GOP Rep. Kevin Cramer, who is challenging vulnerable Democratic Sen. Heidi Heitkamp in one of this fall’s marquee races.

Heitkamp, who last year supported Trump’s first Supreme Court nominee, Neil Gorsuch, is again vulnerable in this GOP-heavy state. Indiana Sen. Joe Donnelly and West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin are also Democrats seeking re-election in states where Trump thumped Democrat Hillary Clinton in 2016.

Meanwhile, Susan B. Anthony List, a group opposed to abortion, and the National Organization for Marriage, which opposes same-sex marriage, were stepping up their effort to rally conservatives who, until Kennedy’s retirement was announced, might not have felt motivated to vote.

“There’s tendency toward complacency. But this buoys the base on the right,” Susan B. Anthony List executive vice president Mallory Quigley said, referring to the court vacancy. “The enthusiasm on the other side is something to be aware of, but we have every reason to be encouraged.”

Still, some Republicans face challenges as abortion becomes a top issue. In Nevada, Heller is the lone Republican senator seeking re-election in a state Clinton carried in 2016. It’s also where, unlike Heller, popular Republican Gov.

Brian Sandoval supports abortion rights, and where voters codified the right to an abortion with a 1990 referendum. Rosen's warnings that abortion rights are under threat like never before could prove especially salient with voters there.

Helping elevate the social battle nationally, several Democratic senators weighing 2020 presidential campaigns jumped into the debate Thursday morning rallying from the steps of the Supreme Court.

Sen. Cory Booker pledged a long-term battle to prevent Trump from rushing a conservative judge onto the court, even as he acknowledged it will be difficult for Democrats to block any nominee since Republicans control the Senate.

"We now must fight," the New Jersey Democrat said.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand said Kennedy's retirement sets up a situation where "women's lives are at risk."

The New York Democrat said that giving Trump the chance to pick Kennedy's replacement threatens abortion rights and raises the question of "whether we are going to be arresting women for making decisions about their bodies."

Source: <http://www.njherald.com/article/20180629/AP/306299959#>

[Disclaimer]