

March for Life will continue until 'abortion is unthinkable,' says official

WASHINGTON (CNS) – When the Supreme Court ruled June 24 that there is no constitutional right to abortion, the historic decision came a day before what would have been the 98th birthday of Nellie Gray, founder of the March for Life.

The march – which Gray, a Texas-born government lawyer, founded in 1974 to mark the first anniversary of the court's *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion nationwide – is a fixture of Catholic pro-life activism and bus pilgrimages to the nation's capital.

So the ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, and Gray's mission accomplished, has led to speculation as to the future of the national march.

Will it continue?

Yes, said Jeanne Mancini, who became March for Life president in 2013, a year after Gray's death.

But there's a new emphasis on growing statewide marches, an effort that began a few years ago.

"We will still be having our federal legislative battles," Mancini said on a June 29 webcast, "Life Beyond *Roe*," sponsored by a consortium of pro-life groups.

But "I would say the voices will have more impact at the state level" as state legislatures that have not already enacted abortion bans begin to debate legislation, she said. "So it's like less is more."

March for Life has held state marches in Connecticut, Virginia

and California, with ones planned for Pennsylvania in September and Ohio in October.

Next year, Mancini said the plans are to double the number, and over the next six years, to have marches in all 50 state capitals.

As for the *Dobbs* decision, "I can't think of a better birthday gift for Nellie," she added. In a June 25 statement, Mancini promised, "We will continue to march until abortion is unthinkable."

The *Dobbs* case was a challenge to a Mississippi law banning abortion after 15 weeks. With a 6-3 majority, the court upheld the law, but, the high court also voted 5-4 to overturn its 1973 *Roe* decision and 1992's *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* ruling, which affirmed *Roe*.

The court's reversal of *Roe* now puts abortion policy decisions in the hands of the states.

At least half of the states plan to ban or restrict abortions with this decision in place, and 13 states have trigger laws put in place and set to ban abortions right away if the *Dobbs* ruling reversed *Roe*.

However, several states, like California, Colorado and New York, have doubled-down on the laws they have in place allowing abortion right up to a woman's due date.

And the fight at the federal level is far from over, especially if President Joe Biden has any say.

At a June 30 news conference in Madrid, after the close of a NATO meeting, Biden called the court's reversal of *Roe* "absolutely outrageous" and said the court has "taken away" people's privacy rights. "We (the U.S.) have been a leader on privacy rights," he said.

The Constitution does not explicitly guarantee a right to

privacy, but the high court in 1973 said in its 7-2 *Roe* decision that the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment provides a fundamental "right to privacy," which protects a pregnant woman's right to an abortion.

The court's most vocal critics say the *Dobbs* ruling could lead to other rights being negated, like same-sex marriage.

"We have to codify *Roe v. Wade* into law," Biden told reporters. "The way to do that is to make sure the Congress votes to do that. And if the filibuster gets in the way, it's like voting rights. We should be requiring an exception for this, requiring an exception to the filibuster for this action to deal with the Supreme Court decision."

"I feel extremely strongly that I'm going to do everything in my power, which I legally can do in terms of executive orders, as well as push the Congress and the public," Biden said.

On June 28, Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra told reporters that "every option is on the table" for ensuring women who want an abortion can get one.

"We will take a look at everything we can. And everything we do will be in compliance with the law," he said. In response to a question, he said that could include opening abortion clinics on federal land, which would not be governed by any state law restricting or banning abortion.

In January 1974, the first March for Life was organized in Gray's living room at her Capitol Hill home and drew about 10,000 participants.

In a 2010 interview with Catholic News Service, Gray said the impetus came from the Knights of Columbus. "I didn't even know who they were, but they explained their stance against abortion and needed a place to meet to discuss plans for a march."

Since Mancini took over, the march has grown from a relatively modest event that went from the West Front of the Capitol to the Supreme Court sidewalk to an immense rally on the National Mall with marchers from across the country, including members of Congress and the occasional show business celebrity.

The 2020 event is considered to be the largest one in the march's history. With President Donald Trump as the main rally speaker, it drew more than 100,000 participants.

The smallest one came just a year later during the COVID-19 pandemic. Only an invited group of 80, joined by more than 100 others midway in their route, marched from the Museum of the Bible to the Supreme Court.

It was the first outdoor event in Washington since the Jan. 6, 2021, violence at the Capitol; both the Capitol and Supreme Court were surrounded by high fences.

Counterprotesters over the years have been few in number. This past January, the march was briefly delayed when members of Patriot Front, a neo-Nazi group, attempted to lead the march on Constitution Avenue.

But they had announced their plans in advance on social media, so police who were expecting them quickly escorted them away to a nearby Metro subway station.