

## COMMENT

ment is not obligated to release this report. But special counsels have put out final reports in the past. In 2000 special counsel John Danforth, a former Republican senator appointed to examine the 1993 Waco disaster, issued a report criticizing FBI agents and Justice Department lawyers. "He had plenty to say about matters that did not rise to the level of prosecution," says a former senior Justice Department official. "And he made damn sure it got out publicly. As an outsider and heavyweight person, Danforth had enough leverage to say to the Attorney General, make as much of this public as possible or you're going to have a worse problem when I say I am being gagged. Fitzgerald cannot play that card."

The latest developments signal that Justice is disinclined to do more than the minimum unless it is pressed from the outside. Both the leaker(s) and the investigators must be squeezed.

DAVID CORN

## We're Not Sorry, Charlie

Last January 22, the thirtieth anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, Patricia Beninato was annoyed. It seemed that every time she turned on the news, anti-choicers were yelling about babies being slaughtered or erroneously claiming that women who have abortions are destined for clinical depression. "I had an abortion," thought Beninato, a 37-year-old customer-service rep in Richmond, Virginia, "and I'm glad I did. Someone should put up a website for women who had abortions and don't regret it." She happened to be between jobs, so Beninato decided she would be that someone. Thus, [www.imnotsorry.net](http://www.imnotsorry.net) was founded—and has since gathered more than 100 stories.

When she researched what was already out there before launching the site, Beninato found only anti-choice counseling outfits like [afterabortion.com](http://afterabortion.com) and Rachel's Vineyard ministry, which offer misleading medical information and propaganda from women who describe being coerced into abortion by controlling older boyfriends and Planned Parenthood "salespeople." Indeed, the real voices of women who have had abortions are hard to find,

despite the fact that there are more than a million abortions a year, and many millions of American women who have had one or more. Because it's a private moment, often a sad and stressful moment, the sheer mass of women who have had abortions and are glad is invisible. Even closeted.

The media bear this out—while there is no shortage of pro-choice activists making demands for preserving safe legal abortion, hardly any coverage features women who are "out" about having had an abortion. Women are perhaps even quieter than they were pre-*Roe*, when at least a few hundred feminists held speak-outs and signed public petitions about their illegal abortions. Meanwhile, the Texas Justice Foundation, an anti-choice group dedicated to protecting women from the "tragedy of abortion" and the "physical, emotional and spiritual damage" it invariably causes, has been collecting affidavits from women who regret their abortions. Earlier this year, Norma McCorvey, the plaintiff in *Roe*, whose change of heart has made her the darling of the anti-choice crowd, included the affidavits when she filed a petition in court to have *Roe* overturned.

Her petition was rejected, but the PR strategy behind it should not go unanswered: It's time to tap into the well of women who have had abortions and don't regret it. Moved by Beninato's phrase, I have been working on a campaign to recast the *Roe* anniversary, January 22, as I'm Not Sorry Day. The campaign consists of three elements: a film directed by Gillian Aldrich documenting women's experiences with abortion, T-shirts that read I HAD AN ABORTION and a postcard that lists such resources as unbiased post-abortion counseling and the National Network of Abortion Funds. The message of the day is that women might have complex, or even painful, experiences with abortion, but they are still confident they made the right decision and adamant that it had to be their decision to make.

The response has been amazing. In an effort to think of people I could hit up whom I hadn't already tapped out, I wrote letters to my mother's friends in Fargo, North Dakota. Within days, half the women had responded with long letters, some criticisms and plenty of checks. An e-mail that feminists Rosalyn Baxandall (who participated in the original 1969 speak-out) and Katha Pollitt sent to friends raised nearly all the money I needed to get the film going in less than two weeks. A mention of the project in Katha's "Subject to Debate" column elicited forty-eight incredible abortion stories from women around the country. The Third Wave Foundation agreed to fund the T-shirts, and women from Philadelphia, St. Paul and Columbus, Ohio, offered to buy and distribute the shirts.

The January 22 event will also serve to garner support for the March for Women's Lives in Washington, DC, on April 25. Originally called Save Women's Lives: March for Freedom of Choice, the name was changed to reflect a broadened coalition of co-sponsors, including Black Women's Health Imperative, and an agenda that expands beyond "choice" to address the problem of limited access to reproductive healthcare, especially among poor, young and minority women. As we gear up for another election cycle, it's crucial to understand abortion rights in terms of women's most basic ability to live in freedom—or even to live, period. After all, legalizing abortion immediately ended once-

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CALVIN TRILLIN

HEREIN RALPH NADER'S  
LATEST RATIONALE FOR  
ANOTHER PRESIDENTIAL  
RUN IS EXPLAINED  
WITHOUT THE USE OF THE  
WORD 'COCKAMAMIE'

It's easy to forget, but still true  
That creepy guys have ego trips too.

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common killers of pregnant women like septicemia and bleeding to death from an amateur D and C. “Legalizing abortion was a public health advance on a par with the polio vaccine,” says women’s health writer Barbara Seaman.

If abortion were connected to actual women—people like my friend Amy Richards, who had an abortion at 18 and a selective reduction last year when she found she was pregnant with triplets, or Nancy Flynn, who was a single mom finishing her BA at Cornell when she had an abortion and who told me she would “never have been able to have the rich life I’ve had and help my son as much as I have if I’d been the single mother of two children”—perhaps the mounting restrictions wouldn’t pass so handily. To paraphrase the late poet Muriel Rukeyser: What if women told the truth about their abortions? Even if the world didn’t split open, this paralyzing issue might.

JENNIFER BAUMGARDNER

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*Jennifer Baumgardner’s new book, Grassroots (written with Amy Richards), is due out this fall. Although the film isn’t ready this year, there will be an event January 22 at Bluestockings bookstore in New York (172 Allen Street, 7–8:30 PM) and other events as far away as Grand Forks, North Dakota. Laura Flanders’s Your Call radio program will also feature a Roe anniversary show. Listen online at [www.yourcallradio.org](http://www.yourcallradio.org).*

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