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## For transgender advocates, restricting health care comes right out of anti-abortion playbook

6–8 minutes



As transgender advocates listened Wednesday to U.S. Supreme Court arguments on a Tennessee ban on gender-affirming care for minors, they drew parallels to the anti-abortion movement.

"We have an oppressed group of people who are facing the

Supreme Court and whatever decision is made, it's going to affect all transgender people, not just the ones who are living in Tennessee," said Julie Reuss, president of [PFLAG Waukesha](#). "These will have ramifications across the entire country. Transgender people are watching a group of justices determine their rights to health care. Well, if that isn't terrifying, I don't know what is."

That fear is exacerbated by the tenor of the just completed election season, in which transgender issues came to the fore. For months, Republicans flooded airwaves with ads that highlighted the disconnect between liberal Democrats and mainstream America. Few captured the issue like an ad from Donald Trump's campaign that ended with, "Kamala Harris is for they/them. Donald Trump is for you."

Now, Reuss said, there is a scramble among transgender people across the state and country to find safety and support.

"It's causing a lot of confusion and fear. I'm hearing people are getting their financial documents and other legal paperwork in order. People are making plans, but do they leave the state? Do they leave the country? Where can they actually go in the world that will accept them?" Reuss said.

Florida's [ban on gender-affirming care for transgender minors](#), Reuss offered as an example, has led to families driving hundreds of miles to get the care they need for their children, or fleeing the state entirely. Many have moved to considerably more tolerant, but expensive, states like Colorado, Washington and Connecticut.

"The parallels of anti-abortion and trans rights are definitely there," Reuss said. "A lot of times, these issues go hand in hand, because if you take away the rights of one group of people, how easy is it to take away the rights of another group of people?"

Of his many promises for the first day of his presidency, Trump has vowed to sign an executive order instructing federal agencies to "[cease the promotion of sex or gender transition at any age.](#)" Hanging in the balance is whether transgender individuals will have access to health care and be protected by federal antidiscrimination laws or be at the mercy of state- and federal-mandated orders.

Lanae Erickson, senior vice president of the center-left think tank Third Way, said enforcing bans and restricting who has access to medical care is akin to denying the existence of transgender people.

"There's so much federal money in health care. If they try to say 'Any provider who takes Medicare or Medicaid dollars, or any provider who takes research money from the federal government, may not provide health care to transgender people,' that's pretty much everyone," Erickson said. "That's the scariest part. They could try to do an overt ban, but they almost wouldn't need to. The impact of those things would be essentially the same thing."

**Related:** [Supreme Court weighs high-profile case on transgender youths' access to medical care](#)

**Exit polls don't reflect Republican's aggressive**

## anti-trans sentiments

All of this comes despite a number of exit polls indicating anti-trans efforts did not strike a chord with voters.

Change Research, a left-leaning pollster, conducted research in eight battleground states, including Wisconsin, to see if the anti-trans campaign ads impacted how voters supported U.S. Senate and presidential candidates. The results indicated they failed to have an impact. More than two-thirds of all voters and more than half of Republicans felt frustrated by the transgender-focused attack ads, and agreed the ads used transgender people as "political tools."

Ads on crime and the economy resonated the most.

**Related:** [Republicans zero in on transgender messaging as attack line in Wisconsin campaigns](#)

That aligned with an overwhelming consensus among surveyed voters: 82% of all voters, and 72% of Republicans, said they'd rather see ads about other issues. A vast majority of voters, at 86%, wanted politicians to stay focused on issues that mattered to them — not transgender issues.

"People did not vote for anti-trans rhetoric and policies," said Abigail Swetz, executive director of Fair Wisconsin.





According to the [2024 CNN exit poll](#), Wisconsinites ranked the economy as their most important issue at 35%, the state of democracy at 33%, abortion at 15% and immigration at 11%. Still, Republicans spent \$82 million nationally in the final months of the election cycle to hammer Democratic lawmakers and candidates over support of transgender athletes and gender-affirming care for minors.

Days after Trump's victory, Attorney General Josh Kaul told the Journal Sentinel at a Madison press event that the ads were "deeply concerning" and not in line with Wisconsin's values. Kaul also contended that in heavily campaigned areas of the state where the anti-trans ads ran, Republicans underperformed.

"I hope that that sends a message that those types of messages are not ones that resonate with people," Kaul said, adding that the Wisconsin Department of Justice is committed to standing up for the rights of all Wisconsinites. "In the event that there are efforts to target people based on their identity that are unlawful and we are able to take action, we're committed to doing that."

**Related:** [Fact check: No, Tammy Baldwin didn't give funding to a 'transgender-affirming clinic' for youth](#)

**More:** [Eric Hovde said trans youths have highest rate of suicide, driven by regret. Not true.](#)

## **Misinformation hurts understanding, compassion and acceptance**

Every year, PFLAG Waukesha sets up tables at the Waukesha farmers' market and, every year, Reuss hears from parents and grandparents who want to better understand a transgender person in their lives. The conversations, Reuss said, are wonderful, in part because she's able to educate community goers.

Reuss can share with Waukesha passersby her personal experiences being the mother of a transgender person, how to support them, and how to correct some miscommunications. For Reuss, it's about being open-minded. But she's aware of the opposite mentality.

"If they are in a community that forces the negativity all the time, they will not learn at all, right, they will not come forward," Reuss said.

Swetz wants to see more allies to transgender people showing up to support, listen, learn, step up and educate themselves and each other. For Swetz, to accept anti-transgender attitudes is to "obey in advance and give in to bullying behavior."