

Analysis: Is abortion a potent political issue in Utah?

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This past legislative session, the majority Republicans passed, and GOP Gov. Gary Herbert signed, an abortion restriction bill that clearly violates the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* and will land Utah in a federal court case it may well lose.

And Utah GOP candidates – or likely candidates in 2020 – are starting to talk about abortion when many of them didn't mention it for months, or even years.

What is going on here?

And is abortion-bashing good politics in Utah – especially for Republicans?

While many may say that in conservative, red Utah, it is always smart to criticize abortion – for it is opposed both in the state GOP platform and, by and large, by the Mormon culture and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – the state's dominant religion.

But the issue of abortion tends to only show up as election time nears – for outside of election season we don't hear much about it.

At last weekend's Salt Lake County GOP convention, Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox was a stand-in for Herbert. And Cox, under the agenda title of giving an update to delegates about Republican state governance, started criticizing abortion.

Herbert is not running for re-election next year. And most likely Cox will seek the governorship.

So it was a good opportunity for Cox to throw some political red meat at delegates – some of whom may be voting on him in the 2020 state Republican Convention.

And you can't get much more red meat than talking anti-abortion before conservative, mostly Mormon Republican delegates.

Over the last few years, UtahPolicy.com and its pollster – Dan Jones & Associates – have polled on abortion views in Utah.

And while overall, the 1973 landmark abortion ruling *Roe v. Wade* is grudgingly accepted here, the idea of abortion is not popular.

Here are some of the numbers:

- = 44 percent of Utahns “strongly” or “somewhat” support *Roe v. Wade* as the law of the land.
- = But 37 percent “strongly” or “somewhat” want *Roe* overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court.
- = And 19 percent didn't know.

Even though the high court may have become more conservative with the recent two appointments by GOP President Donald Trump, it still may be a reach to expect the court to overturn *Roe* after 45 years of precedent.

But on the partisan side, opposing *Roe* is a good political move for a Republican Mormon, especially one like Cox who has been openly accepting of other social issues, like gay rights and welcoming immigrants.

- = 56 percent of Republicans want *Roe* overturned, an August 2018 DJA survey shows.
 - = 69 percent of those who said they are “very conservative” politically want it overturned.
 - = And 52 percent of folks who said they are “very active” in the LDS faith want *Roe* overturned.
- In another question a few months earlier, DJA found:
- = 52 percent of Utahns believe abortion should “be illegal in most cases.”
 - = While only 28 percent said it should be “legal in most cases.”
 - = 71 percent of Republicans said abortion should be “illegal in most cases,” while only 13 percent said it should be “legal in most cases.”
 - = 67 percent of “very conservative” folks said abortion should be “illegal in most cases.”
 - = And 72 percent of “active” LDS agreed – illegal in most cases.

So, if you want to win the Republican nomination for a large office, like governor or U.S. Senate or House, you had better be against abortion.

And you likely want to talk about it as often as you can in running for office.

Or you want to vote for it if you are a Republican in the Legislature, or sign it into law if you are the GOP governor – or if you are a governor wannabe.