

Sen. Cory Booker Wants Men to Do More for Abortion Rights, and That Includes Saying the Word

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By Lauren Rankin



In this op-ed, Lauren Rankin explains why cisgender men must advocate for abortion as Sen. Cory Booker said, and why that's just a starting point.

It only took four Democratic debates but finally, abortion became a major topic of discussion. Before the candidates were even asked about how they would protect reproductive rights in the face of state bans, Sen. Kamala Harris forced the issue into a question about health care. “There are states that have passed laws that will virtually prevent women from having access to reproductive health care,” she said. “It’s not an exaggeration to say women will die because these Republican legislatures in these various states, who are out of touch with America, are telling women what to do with their bodies.”

While Sen. Harris is obviously right that attacks on abortion are attacks on women, that’s not the full picture. This basic health care service, one that has been legal for nearly 50 years, one that is so common that one in four women in the U.S. will have one by age 45, has long been sidelined as a “women’s issue.” Seemingly uncomfortable with the word, some supporters of abortion rights — both women and men — often couch it in language like “a woman’s right to choose” or “women’s reproductive rights.”

We are in a unique moment of crisis for abortion rights, one largely driven by cisgender men. It’s also one that cisgender men can help solve. In fact, they have a critical responsibility to help solve it.

That's what Sen. Cory Booker was attempting to do during Tuesday's debate when he joined the fray, decrying the lack of focus on the erosion of reproductive rights and emphasizing the importance of this issue. Echoing his open letter to men in defense of abortion rights earlier this year, Booker made his case. "God bless Kamala, but you know what, women should not be the only ones taking up this cause and this fight," he said. "It's not just because women are our daughters and our friends and our wives; it's because women are people, and people deserve to control their own body."

Yes, women are people. And yes, women deserve to control what happens to their bodies and their lives. And yes, women have abortions (though not exclusively — trans men and non-binary folks also have and need abortion care). And, women aren't the only ones whose well-being is at stake with the erosion of reproductive rights. Ending access to safe, legal abortion doesn't just affect women — it affects everyone, and that includes cisgender men.

A patriarchal society may benefit men, but it also constricts their choices and options. We know from pre-Roe days and from countries where abortion is heavily restricted or outright illegal that banning abortion doesn't mean abortions stop; instead, it means an increase in unsafe abortions and higher maternal mortality rates. That might be why the vast majority of American men support abortion rights. In a recent NPR/Marist poll, only 14% of men said they wanted to overturn Roe v. Wade, and 47% said that they favored either leaving the landmark legislation exactly as it is or expanding and codifying it.

This is heartening, but it's not enough. Quietly supporting legal abortion is not enough, not when we're facing a full-on crisis for abortion rights. Seven states have passed bans on abortion early in pregnancy in 2019 alone, and more states are poised to do so in the coming months. More than half of women of reproductive age (nearly 40 million) live in a state hostile to abortion rights, and 89% of U.S. counties were without an abortion provider as of 2017. The Supreme Court is set to hear oral arguments in a case that, if five men rule in favor of restrictions, could make it easier for states across the country to shutter abortion clinics, potentially making accessing a safe, legal abortion all but impossible for millions of people.

Cisgender men got us into this mess, and they can help get us out.

Abortion has never really been just a "women's issue." At its core, abortion is about privacy, dignity, humanity, and the ability to determine what happens to your own body. In the context of a partnership, it can also be about navigating those choices with your partner as you see fit, about determining for yourselves what kind of family you want to have, what kind of life you want to have.

It is an unfettered social good to give people the tools and resources they need to determine the course of their own lives. There is nothing controversial or shameful about choosing to terminate a pregnancy, whether you are single or you have a partner.

And there is everything to celebrate and encourage in men who love, support, and stand in solidarity with their own partners who choose to have an abortion, and with the millions of other pregnant people who do, as well.

You don't have to know firsthand how something feels to empathize with that experience. Men don't have to know what it feels like to face an unwanted pregnancy in their own bodies to understand the fear and confusion that may accompany it. In fact, many men *do* experience that when their partner faces an unplanned pregnancy. And that's okay. It's okay to feel the myriad feelings that surround pregnancy and childbirth.

For too long, men have either wielded their privilege and power as a weapon against women's autonomy, or they have cowered on the sidelines, unsure of what to say or how to support. But really, men, it's simple. Here's what we need you to do: Say "I support abortion rights." Say it to your friends, to your family, to the women *and* men in your life. If you live in a state that has recently passed a ban on abortion, it's not enough to shake your head. We need you to speak out. Call your legislators and demand support for abortion rights. Contact your [local abortion clinic](#) and ask how you can support them. Consider volunteering as a clinic escort. Donate to the [National Network of Abortion Funds](#).

And perhaps most simply and fundamentally, say the word "abortion."

No one is asking cisgender men to lead this movement. As Sen. Booker noted, women and trans folks have been doing that for years. We need you to stand beside us, to fight with us, to speak up not for "a woman's right to choose," but for abortion rights.

The future looks bleak for legal abortion across large swaths of the U.S., and the stakes have never been higher. If more abortion clinics are forced to close and legal abortion becomes a mere memory across the South and the Midwest, it won't just be women who will suffer.

It's time for those who support abortion to say so — all of us.