

Supreme Court OKs abortion protests

By Gina Holland
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that federal racketeering and extortion laws were improperly used to punish aggressive anti-abortion protesters, lifting a nationwide injunction that barred people from interfering with clinic business.

The court's 8-1 ruling applies to protests of all sorts, not just at abortion clinics.

Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, writing for the majority, said that when protesters do not "obtain" property, they cannot be punished under federal extortion laws.

The court's ruling is a victory for Operation Rescue, anti-abortion leader Joseph Scheidler and others who were ordered to pay damages to abortion clinics and were barred from interfering with their businesses for 10 years. The ruling ends that injunction.

Rehnquist said their protests did not qualify as extortion.

That outcome had been sought by activists and even some organizations that support abortion rights. They argued that protesters of all types could face harsher penalties for demonstrating, if the court ruled otherwise.

"This opinion is a green light to the people who have been orchestrating this violence behind the scenes to proceed full speed ahead," said Kim Gandy, president of the National

Organization for Women. Scheidler said the ruling will probably draw new adherents to his cause, but is not likely to mean a new round of violent activism outside clinics.

"That's in the past," Scheidler said. "Now we can go on protesting and counseling at

the clinics, doing things that we do. We'll have much more freedom."

The ruling ends a case begun in 1986, when NOW and two

abortion clinics in Wisconsin and Delaware went to court claiming racketeering and extortion laws should protect businesses from violent protests that drive away clients.

They accused the groups of blocking clinic entrances, menacing doctors, patients and clinic staff, and destroying equipment during a 15-year campaign to limit abortions. The demonstrators were ordered to pay about \$258,000 in damages.

Rehnquist said there is no dispute that abortion protesters interfered with clinic operations and in some cases committed crimes.

"But even when their acts of interference and disruption achieved their ultimate goal of 'shutting down' a clinic that performed abortions, such acts did not constitute extortion," he wrote.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Antiwar protesters call, fax legislators

WASHINGTON (AP) — Antiwar protesters on Wednesday made hundreds of thousands of phone calls and sent faxes and e-mails to senators and the White House to voice their opposition to a war on Iraq as part of a "virtual march" on the nation's capital.

Senators, regardless of their position on the war, were barged with calls. Other calls to both Democrat and Republican

Senate offices could not be completed because of busy circuits.

"We will let our fingers do the marching and demand that our voices be heard," said Tim Andrews, the national director for Win for War, the group that organized the protest.

Andrews said about 400,000 people had registered through the group's web site for the call-in campaign. By Wednesday afternoon, he projected the number of calls made and faxes sent exceeded 1 million.

STILLPOINT

Evening Prayer at Peace

Sunday Evenings, 6:30 p.m.

A short service of quiet prayer
Come as you are
wherever you are on your journey of faith

Peace Lutheran Church
Rio Grande & Harvey Mitchell Pkwy.

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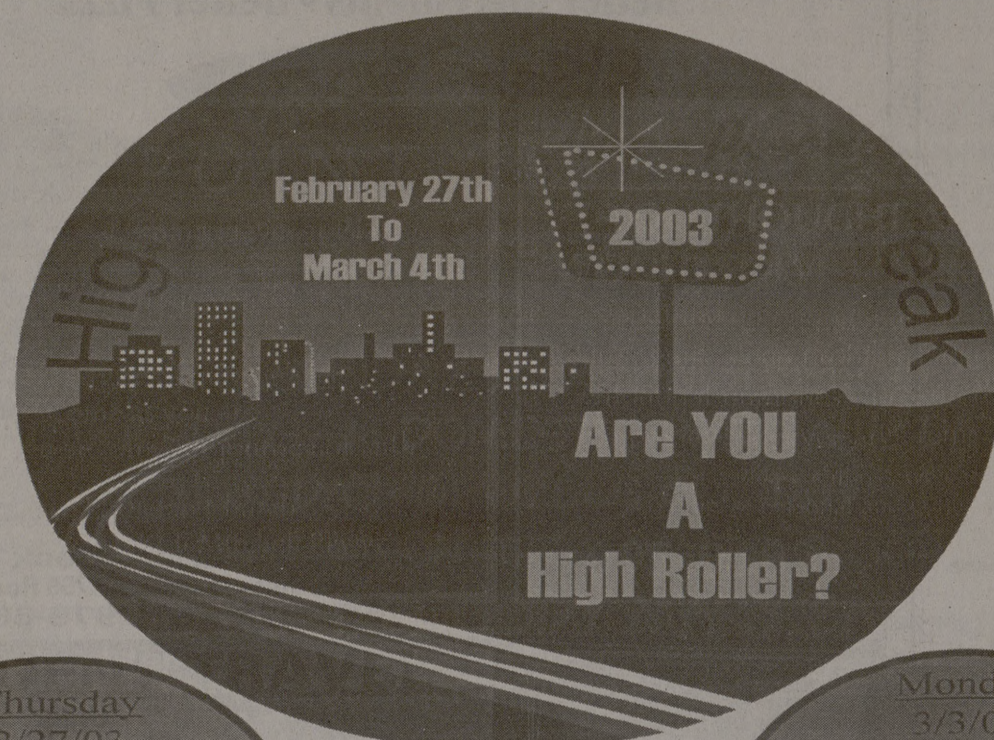
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8pm to 11pm
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7pm - 11pm
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Food! Music! Fun!

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2/28/03

Aggie Nights

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Tuesday

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5K Fun Run/Walk through campus starting at
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All participants will receive a t-shirt and be
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