

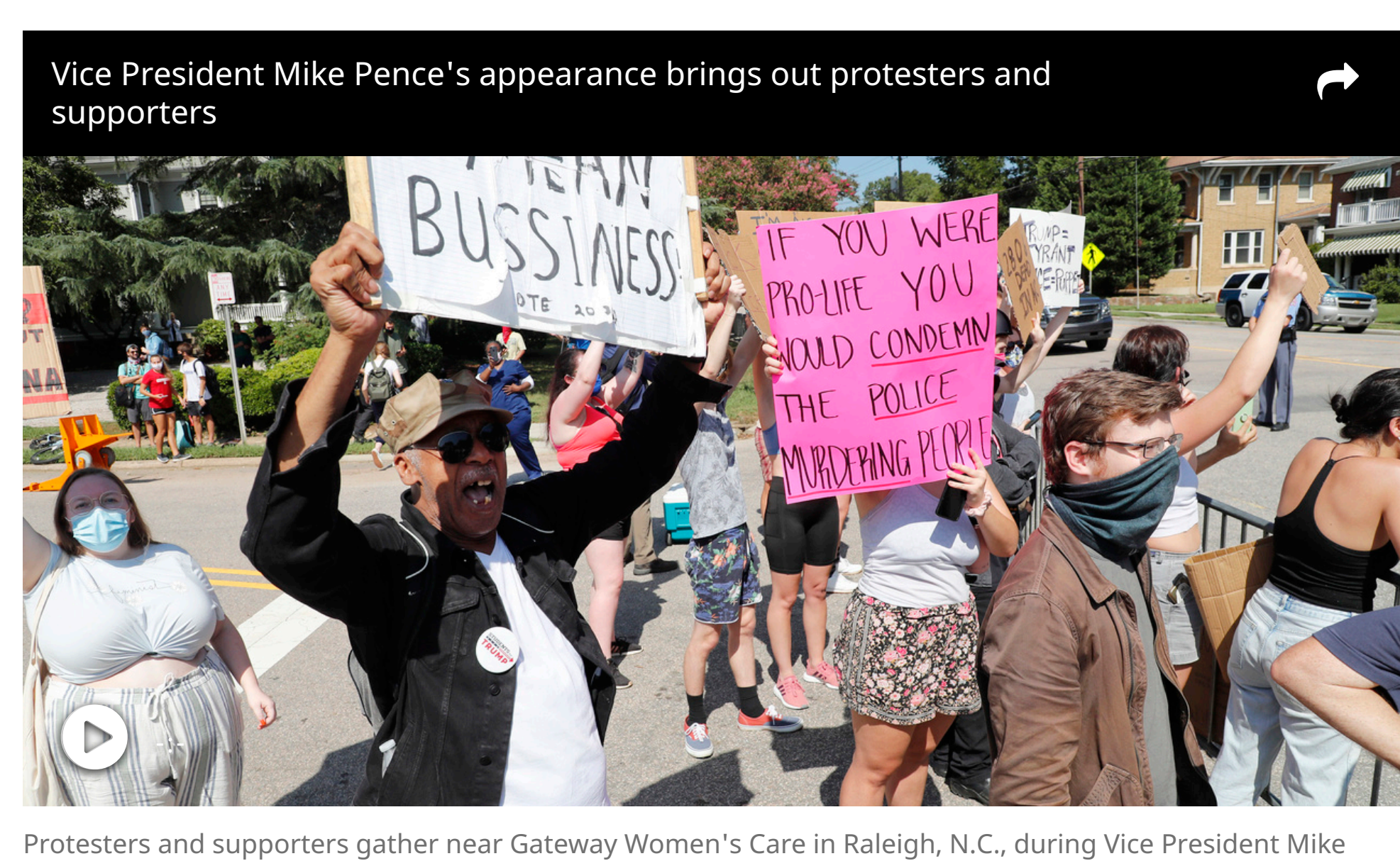


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OPINION COLUMNS & BLOGS

## Providing more access to birth control will reduce abortions in South Carolina

BY BONNIE KAPP  
OCTOBER 02, 2020 10:41 AM, UPDATED OCTOBER 03, 2020 07:45 AM



Vice President Mike Pence's appearance brings out protesters and supporters

Protesters and supporters gather near Gateway Women's Care in Raleigh, N.C., during Vice President Mike Pence's visit Thursday, Sept. 3, 2020. BY ETHAN HYMAN

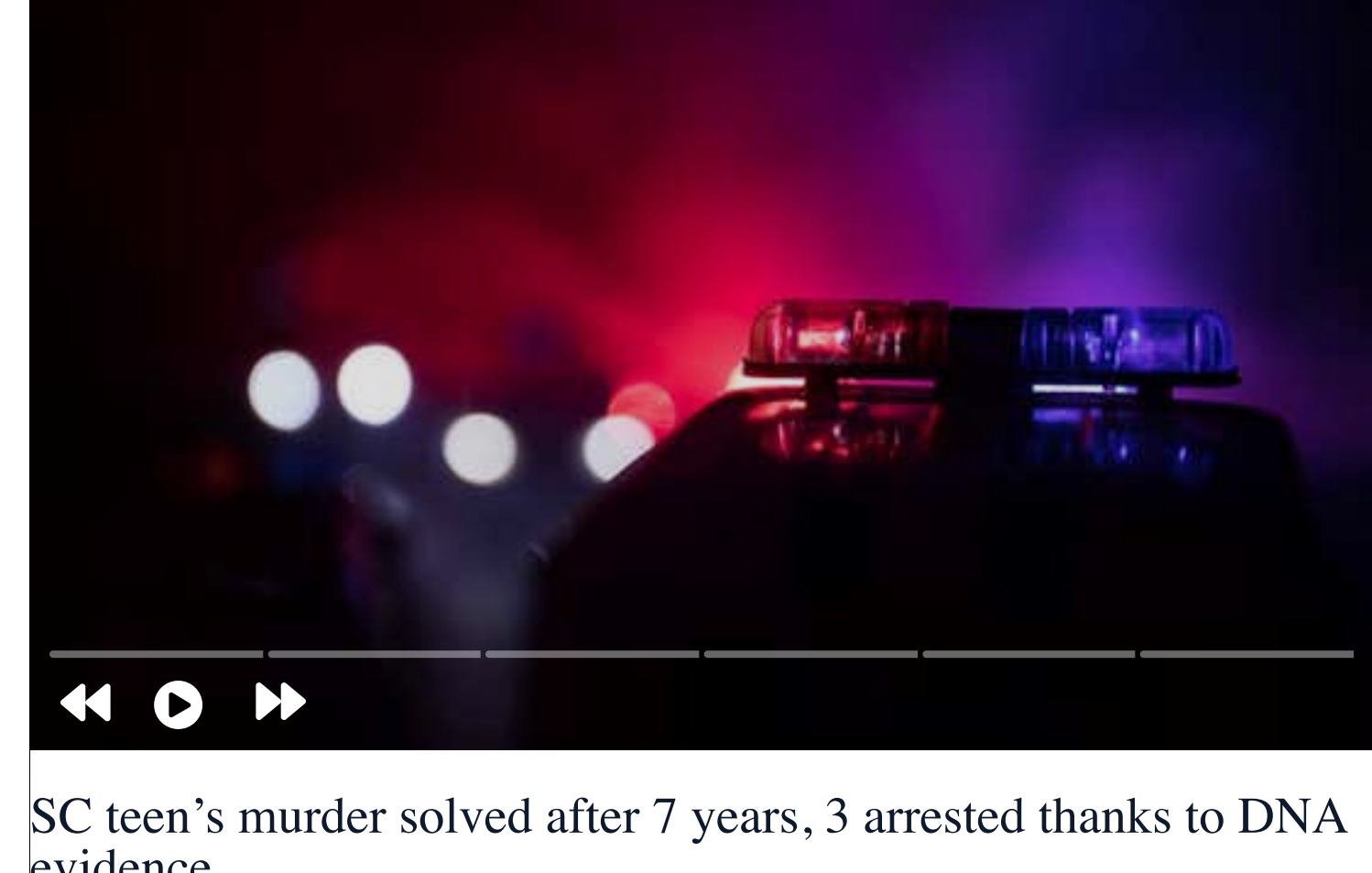
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President Donald Trump's nomination of Judge Amy Coney Barrett to the U.S. Supreme Court has put the incendiary issue of abortion front and center once again.

In a year when Americans are divided along partisan lines more than ever before, the issue of abortion is sure to light fires from kitchen tables to Congress as it has for over 40 years since *Roe v. Wade* became law.

Both sides talk as though finding middle ground in the abortion debate is unfathomable, but that's not necessarily true.

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Because the vast majority of abortions are directly related to an unintended pregnancy — a pregnancy that is unplanned, mistimed or unwanted — reducing the number of unintended pregnancies leads to fewer abortions.

States that have expanded their family planning services to include all birth control methods, including highly effective long-acting contraceptives, have cut their abortion rates by as much as half.

**CHOOSE WELL IS WORKING**

According to the state Department of Health and Environmental Control's Pregnancy Assessment and Monitoring System, 53% of pregnancies in South Carolina — or roughly one out of every two — are unintended.

That's a big problem that impacts many women, children and families, especially low-income and uninsured individuals.

So the nonprofit New Morning has taken on this problem.

With 70 participating organizations and 168 sites, we have developed and implemented Choose Well, a contraceptive access program of unprecedented scale.

More than 250,000 South Carolinians have received contraceptive services at Choose Well's partnering clinics since the program was launched in early 2017.

In all there have been more than 1 million visitors to Choose Well's consumer-facing website NoDrama.org, where individuals can learn about all birth control methods — and find out where and how they can get the method that they want at little or no cost.

For the last four years Choose Well has been funded entirely by the private sector, but in 2022 these funds will run out.

**TIME TO ACT**

It's time for policymakers in South Carolina to invest seriously in our state's women, children and families by sustaining this program, which is meeting a critical need. The cost to the state would be nominal, but the benefits to the state are calculable:

- According to The Guttmacher Institute, for every 100,000 patients who receive contraceptive services:
    - 21,000 unintended pregnancies will be prevented.
    - 10,000 unplanned births will be prevented.
    - 7,200 abortions will be prevented.
- In addition South Carolina's taxpayers will avoid paying \$48 million in birth-related costs; the fact is that unintended pregnancies lead to more taxpayer dollars being spent on public programs such as Medicaid.

There are other benefits associated with reducing unintended pregnancies.

Women who have unintended pregnancies are at greater risk of suffering from mental health problems and physical abuse.

Children whose births were unintended are more likely to experience adverse developmental and behavioral outcomes.

Women's access to family planning counseling and contraception enables them to space births — if and when they decide to have children — and therefore increases the likelihood that they will have better pregnancy-related outcomes.

**SOUTH CAROLINIANS SUPPORT IT**

Where do South Carolinians stand?

Eighty-one percent of Republicans and Democrats surveyed by Benchmark Research in September 2019 supported state funding for birth control for low-income and uninsured women.

Let's hope that when legislators return to Columbia next year, they will join the majority of South Carolinians who know that a healthy South Carolina depends upon us having healthy women, children and families.

*Bonnie Kapp is CEO of New Morning, a Columbia-based nonprofit.*



Bonnie Kapp

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