

The Conflicting Identities of Senator Katrina Jackson: Navigating Faith, Politics, and Reproductive Rights

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Abstract: Senator Katrina Jackson, a prominent figure in Louisiana politics, is celebrated for her dedication to her community and her staunch pro-life stance. A devout Baptist and member of the Democratic party, Jackson embodies a complex intersection of faith and politics. Her commitment to the pro-life movement is evident through her public statements and legislative efforts, most notably Louisiana Act 620, which imposed strict regulations on abortion providers. This legislation, however, placed Jackson at the center of a significant legal battle, challenging the constitutionality of her proposal as it faced the scrutiny of the Supreme Court. As the fate of the bill hung in the air, Jackson faced a pivotal decision: to continue championing her contentious legislation, fueled by her deep-rooted religious beliefs, or reconsider her approach in light of its potential demise to save her good standing with the Democratic party.

Faith, Policy, and Controversy

Since 2020, Katrina Jackson, a Louisiana-born Christian, has served as a Democratic Senator in the Louisiana State Legislature. Senator Jackson, a legislative powerhouse, fiercely adheres to her religious identity as a Baptist Christian, informing her decision-making and proposed policies (Louisiana State Senate Bibliography 2019). Her legislature addresses a plethora of topics, but her public platform is largely focused on protecting unborn fetuses. Jackson's commitment to this notion was captured during a 2020 Louisiana legislative session, where Jackson stated "What's more innocent than a life that has known no sin that has been born into a world of sin?" (Jackson 2020, n.p.). In 2014, Jackson authored Louisiana Act 620, closely mirroring Texas House Bill 2, passed in 2013, which required abortion providers to have admitting privileges in nearby hospitals (Texas Legislative Online 2014). The intention of Louisiana Act 620, or the Unsafe Abortion Protection Act, was to enhance the safety of women who suffered procedural complications at abortion clinics by ensuring that physicians could admit patients to nearby hospitals for further treatment (House Bill No. 388 2014). Senator Jackson argued that this requirement would protect the well-being of pregnant individuals. Still, she did not acknowledge a potential fallout of the bill: the foreclosure of abortion clinics across the state due to their inability to fulfill the complexities of the admitting privileges criteria (Jackson 2014). Act 620's enactment led to fewer available abortion clinics in the state, hindering people's ability to get definitive care due to proximity issues alongside transportation and cost concerns. The admitting privileges requirement imposed financial and logistical burdens on clinics, as applying for admitting privileges is incredibly time- and energy-intensive (*June Medical Services v. Russo* 2020, 25).

Consequently, many closed their doors or significantly reduced the scope of their services to avoid legal penalties (Goddeeris and Rizzo 1998).

Louisiana Act 620 targeted precedence set by *Roe v. Wade* regarding the constitutional right to abortion and other principles, including *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, and *Whole Woman's Health*, as “[u]nnecessary health regulations that have the purpose or effect of presenting a substantial obstacle to a woman seeking an abortion impose an undue burden on the right” and are therefore “constitutionally invalid,” (*June Medical Services v. Russo* 2020, 2). In Jackson’s reflection on the question of foundational legitimacy of her legislation by stakeholders in the Louisiana reproductive rights community, she stated that Act 620 served to win “the war on killing the unborn and murder happening in clinics legally” (Jackson 2020, n.p.). Justice Breyer opposed the constitutionality of Louisiana Act 620 from its conception, arguing in the early proceedings of *June Medical Services v. Russo* that admitting privileges do not serve as a relevant credentialing function for the physician’s competency (*June Medical Services v. Russo* 2020, 20). Instead, Act 620 looked to drastically reduce provider access, further complicating a patient’s access to quality care (Shipman & Goodwin LLP. 2020). Senator Jackson stated that the driving factor in authoring the bill was the commitment to strict guidelines that make a physician eligible for admitting privileges, ensuring the safety and regulations of abortion clinics (Jackson 2014).

When the Federal District Court blocked Louisiana Act 620 in September 2014 by ruling in favor of three abortion clinics and four anonymous abortion providers who sued to stop the bill, Senator Jackson had a decision to make: should she continue to support her dying legislation to appease her right-leaning supporters or invest her time and power into other pieces of legislature that keep her in the good graces of the Democrats (Shipman & Goodwin LLP. 2020)? The tension between Senator Jackson’s personal upbringing and religious beliefs, the expectations of the Democratic party, and the diverse priorities of her constituents shaped her dilemma with Act 620. Additionally, the initial turmoil around Act 620 emerged in late 2014, potentially serving as a pivotal factor in Jackson’s attempt to maintain legislative power during her 2016 reelection campaign for Representative. As a Black, pro-life Democrat representing a largely conservative district, Jackson needed to navigate nuanced political and ideological contradictions that made her next step on this issue pivotal to the trajectory of her professional career.

Senator Katrina Jackson’s Political Identity

Katrina Jackson was born in July of 1977 in Monroe, Louisiana. Even as a child, Jackson was ambitious and outspoken. Brought up as a Baptist Christian, Jackson was grounded in a strong sense of community rooted in its commitment to faith¹. Motivated by her upbringing, Katrina Jackson was set on becoming a “lawyer for the people” and received her Juris Doctorate from Southern University in Baton Rouge in 2004 (Louisiana State Senate Bibliography 2019, n.p.). With continued support from her church, family, and teachers who all preached “separating good people from bad ideas,” Jackson prided herself in her ability to occupy multiple spaces simultaneously and worked alongside Republicans and Democrats alike, highlighting her ability to navigate conflicting identities in her professional career (Senator Katrina Jackson Biography 2019, n.p.). Senator Jackson proudly identified as a pro-life Democrat, emphasizing her Christian faith above her identity as African American, a female in power, and her affiliation with the

¹ Information on Senator Jackson’s upbringing and early political career comes from her biography published by the Louisiana State Senate, cited accordingly.

Democratic party (Olohan 2020). Jackson's commitment to her community's church, Riverside Missionary Baptist Church, senior centers, and community venues informed her role as a legislator (Jackson 2014). She stated that the driving force of her commitment to her religious identity stems from the "general culture of the state" because "it's what we're taught when we're sitting around the dinner table." (Brown 2023). Jackson pointed to her faith as the source of her pro-life efforts in an interview with EWTN Global Catholic Network, where she stated:

The word of God says in all things give honor to him and acknowledge him in all thy ways ... Proverbs says that there are six things that God hates ... one of those is the shedding of innocent blood ... My faith drives me in this because I don't want to be responsible for laws that perpetuate the shedding of innocent blood in America. (Jackson 2020, n.p.)

This unwavering commitment to her religion was a cornerstone of her political influence in Louisiana and nationwide, informing her choices on legislation and her willingness to advocate for a stance that went against her political party (Nelson 2019).

From 2012 to 2020, Senator Jackson served as a Representative in the Louisiana State House of Representatives for District 16, which covers south-central East Baton Rouge Parish. During Jackson's time as Representative, approximately 66% Black voters and 44% White voters comprised her urban district, with a split of 68% Democrat voters and 32% Republican voters (Louisiana Secretary of State Statewide Report of Registered Voters 2014). In 2012, the year of Jackson's election to the House, several white, wealthy parents from the southeastern corner of Baton Rouge proposed the formation of a segregated district called the Southeast Community School District. The racially divided proposal intended to break the group away from the majority-minority school district, which was composed of 46.5% Black students, and isolate their property-tax dollars into their own district (Harris 2019). While the new segregated district was not approved, it set the tone for the community that Jackson was walking into as a Representative-elect. Jackson would need to tread carefully due to the nature of the district, shifting her campaign strategy to lean more into her Christian, pro-life identity to appeal to the new voter demographic. Jackson's intersectional identity secured her position of power as a Representative in the Louisiana House of Representatives from 2012 to 2020 as she appealed to varying populations as a pro-life policymaker while simultaneously milking the Democratic votes from the left-leaning voters. Since 2020, Senator Jackson has served as the Louisiana State Senator for District 34 in Northern Louisiana.

The Pro-Life Democrat

Being a pro-life Democrat uniquely positioned Senator Jackson as she worked against the wishes of the Democratic party, while casting a wide net of deeply religious followers. Pro-life democrats refer to themselves as "whole" democrats, in their pursuit to apply a holistic approach to protect all human life, through "legal protection, life-affirming cultural change, and economic justice" (DFLA 2020, 1). This distinction allowed Jackson to collect votes from pro-life Republicans and moderate Democrats who agreed with her other spheres of political influence, including progressive advocacy for sex education in schools and giving families livable wages (Young 2019). Senator Jackson is notorious for her unapologetically aggressive abortion policies that do not grant exceptions, even in the case of the futility of pregnancy, rape, or incest. Jackson

defended herself when “people in my state... ask me, ‘Why are you a black, female, Democrat lawmaker fighting for life?’ I tell them because I’m a Christian first,” (Jackson 2019, n.p.). Jackson was certainly not alone in these sentiments. Former Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards, who was an influential character throughout the writing process of Act 620 and served as the Governor during the controversy with the bill, openly discussed his stance a pro-life Democrat throughout his campaign, gaining popularity over a mixed bag of voters. During his tenure, Former Governor Bel Edwards also supported more liberal ideals on expanding Louisiana’s Medicaid program under federal law as it too was pro-life, which aligned with Senator Jackson’s assertive stance of abolishing the death penalty. Although Senator Jackson’s stance on restrictive abortion laws created tension with her appeal among Democratic lawmakers, the Democrats for Life organization and Former Governor Bel Edwards stood in solidarity with her. Governor Bel Edwards acted as a shield against scrutiny from the Democratic Party, offering Jackson protection as the party’s Governor at the time. The Democratic party’s compromise on Edwards’ anti-abortion beliefs extended to Senator Jackson. Because of the dwindling of what little power Democrats held in Louisiana after 2007, Katrina Jackson’s rise to candidacy in 2011 served as an opportunity for Democrats to get a seat at the table, regardless of some of Jackson’s contentious positions.² At this point in time, Senator Jackson did not have to choose between her conflicting identities. Jackson capitalized on the desperation of the Democratic party as she authored legislation that would have been vetoed due to ideological differences if Democrats had the majority in the house during Jackson’s tenure. Additionally, the backing from Governor Bel assisted her rise to power as he openly advocated for and approved some of the nation’s strictest abortion laws (Hutchinson 2022).

In Louisiana politics, voters must compromise and decide what they deem the most pressing social issues as the breaking point for whom they elect (McKee 2012). Abortion views are not predicted by party lines in Louisiana, allowing Jackson to get votes from both ends of the political spectrum (Pew Research Center 2024). Jackson served as an attractive candidate for both political parties as she advocated for expansive Medicaid, which appealed to her Democratic identity, juxtaposed with her advocacy for restrictive abortion policies, which resonates with Republican voters who support Jackson’s pro-life policies. Jackson, motivated by her longstanding desire to moderate the Democratic Party’s official position on abortion and challenge “individuals that lead the Party to exclude our pro-life position,” joined the Democrats For Life of America (DFLA) in 2020. (Jackson 2020, n.p.). The Democrats For Life of America drafted a letter to the Democratic National Convention, imploring them to moderate their stance on unrestricted access to abortion as it was “radically out of line with public opinion” (DFLA 2020, 1). The signers, including Senator Jackson, vowed their commitment to “the Democratic principles of equality, fairness, and democracy” (DFLA 2020, 1). The more extreme left-wing Democrats controlled the Party’s direction, pressuring Joe Biden, then a primary candidate, to reverse the Hyde Amendment. This policy had prohibited the use of federal funding to cover abortion-related services under Medicaid, Medicare, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Since 1976, this policy has been included in annual spending bills to discriminate and limit access to abortion (Guttmacher 2021).

² The Louisiana State Senate was controlled by Democrats from 1991 to 2007, but the decline in Democrat power has been palpable. Between 2001 and 2019, 30 Louisiana legislators and politicians switched from the Democratic to the Republican Party. The reason behind the switch is thought to be due to a move away from populist politics and corruption scandals under former Democratic Governor Edwin Edwards (Ryan 2023).

The Democratic party did not acknowledge DFLA's request to end "divisive policies, such as passing a law in Congress defining a right to abortion ... and introducing taxpayer-funded abortion" (DFLA 2020, 1). The lack of response on the nationwide scale of the Democratic party showcases the uniqueness of Jackson's unrestricted privileges to harness the Democratic resources while simultaneously authoring pro-life policies. Jackson's dual identity as a Democrat and devout Christian stayed in the good graces of the Democratic party because of the desperation to keep Democrats in power, allowing her to pass more compelling legislation for the pro-life movement.

Jackson was able to pass controversial abortion policies because of the increasing acceptance of pro-life democrats from the greater Democratic party in Louisiana. After their loss in the 2016 presidential election, the Democratic party was even more welcoming to members with nuanced abortion views (Foran 2016). Many anti-abortion Democrats comfortably slid into their role as political misfits with their deeply rooted belief to protect the lives of unborn fetuses. Arguing that the Democratic Party would struggle to gain popularity in the 2018 midterm election wave if they maintained a far left values, leaders of Democrats for Life movement presented themselves as more moderate Democratic candidates. By casting a wide net, the Democratic Party hoped to snatch states with heavy Roman-Catholic or blue-collar populations like Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, and conservative but heavily Hispanic states like Texas by appealing to educational gaps and profit concerns from the agricultural industry (Haberkorn 2018). With the attraction of grabbing moderate Republican voters who opposed abortion, pro-life Democrats could gain power in historically red districts (Foran 2016). Senator Jackson claimed her seat at the table as a pro-life Democrat by affirming her desire to protect accessible healthcare from conception to death (Jackson 2019). Jackson asserted that her party's position did not necessarily align with her position on any given issue and stated that if her views were opposed to those of the Democratic party, she would fight against them in the name of her faith:

I always say this when people say, 'Why are you a Democrat?' I say because we are the party of the big tent, which means we don't all think the same on all subjects, but we all can agree when we agree and respectfully disagree. There is room to be a pro-life Democrat for anyone who wants to care about the child from conception till death (Jackson 2014, n.p.).

Jackson was well-positioned for the anti-abortion movement because, at this time, she had not yet faced the need to choose between her conflicting identities. Jackson was in good standing with the Democratic party under the protection from Former Governor Bel Edwards and thus made her faith the cornerstone of her position and power as a Senator and legislative author of pro-life bills in Louisiana with little objection. Reflecting on the religious teachings of Riverside Missionary Baptist Church, she remarked, "What's more innocent than a life that has known no sin, born into a world of sin?" (Jackson 2019, n.p.). This conviction drove her to dedicate her career to standing against what she believed God condemns: abortion.

Legislative Action: Jackson's Advocacy for Abortion Restrictions

Senator Katrina Jackson authored House Bill 388, Act No. 620, which outlined the requirements for abortion providers to establish active admitting privileges to a hospital within thirty miles of the clinic (Jackson 2014). House Bill 388 was an example of a targeted regulation

of abortion providers (TRAP) law, coined by abortion rights organizations and advocates, due to the costly and unnecessary requirements it imposed on abortion providers (Planned Parenthood 2024). TRAP laws were designed to close abortion provider clinics rather than make them safer (Planned Parenthood 2024). Pro-life legislators crafted TRAP laws to impose regulations on clinics and physicians that undermined the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision by directly targeting access to care. The verbiage in Louisiana Act 620 closely mirrored the language of Texas HB2, an admitting privileges bill enacted in 2013.

Texas HB2 required physicians performing abortions to have active admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles, significantly restricting access to reproductive care. As a result, the percentage of reproductive-age people living over 50 miles from an abortion clinic doubled (*Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt* 2016). Additionally, HB2 placed undue financial burdens on the remaining facilities, as the cost of paperwork and lawyers was estimated to cost up to 3 million dollars per clinic to gain proper credentials (*Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt* 2016). The implications of Texas HB2 triggered legal challenges and pushback from abortion providers and women's rights advocates alike, as the number of clinics in Texas dropped from 42 comprehensive clinics to 19 (Carbonell, Daniel, etc. 2016). The opposing argument stated that the bill imposed an undue burden on people seeking abortions, not to protect patients nor out of medical necessity, but to restrict abortion access. This pushback led abortion providers to file a lawsuit in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in 2013, the year before Senator Jackson introduced and passed Louisiana Act 620 (Aaronson 2013).

The legal battle over the constitutionality of HB2 did not end in 2013. In June 2016, the United States Supreme Court struck down Texas HB2 under *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*. HB2 was a landmark decision that ruled that the restrictions due to admitting privileges put an undue burden on access to care protected on the precedent of the *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* decision in 1992, which held that the state could not pose unnecessary burdens on people seeking abortion services.

While Senator Jackson was unaware of the outcome of the Supreme Court case for Texas HB2 while drafting Act 620 in 2014, the legal proceeding in the federal judiciary system indicated that the bill pushed too far against precedence to be successful. The beginnings of the turmoil of Texas HB2 in 2013 between pro-choice advocates and federal judiciary system did not deter Jackson from drafting Act 620 just one year later. She asserted that she was writing the bill to improve standards of care for women in Louisiana. Jackson argued that earlier legislatures had purposely neglected the need of admitting privileges in the past, which Jackson felt was necessary for physicians performing abortion to have formal authorization from a nearby hospital to admit and treat patients (Jackson 2014). Given the uproar from Texas HB2, the likelihood of Act 620 standing in Louisiana courts was slim, claiming that facts presented in the law were drastically different than Texas (Hadavi 2020). Jackson defended her bill, nonetheless, arguing that every outpatient or elective procedure requires admitting privileges except for abortion centers. This exception made her question the integrity and safety of abortion clinics as people sought abortions at these centers (2014). Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards encouraged Act 620 forward and was the first to sign it. The initiative angered Democrats who disagreed with the bill, which left little wiggle room for access to comprehensive care and went against one of the foundations of the

Democratic party's beliefs, as the bill was quickly scrutinized for its unconstitutional nature (McGill 2018).

To bring the admitting privilege law to Louisiana, former counsel at Americans United for Life, Dorinda Bordlee, worked with Senator Jackson to draft the Louisiana Act 620, mirroring the language of Texas HB2 (Siegel 2020).³ Email correspondence between the pair, titled "LA HB 388 follow this model," contained content regarding how states like Texas "could use even unconstitutional statutes to get around courts and close clinics" (Siegel 2020, n.p.). Despite the acknowledgment of the fundamentally unconstitutional backbone of the legislation, Senator Katrina Jackson moved forward with the bill, stating the bill was "drafted by women, authored by women, supported by women, and voted for by women" (Jackson 2020, n.p.). Senator Jackson recognized her opportunity to question the stability of precedence determined in the previous attempt to undermine *Roe v. Wade* (Mukpo 2020). Supreme Court Justice J. Breyers stated that the decision to pursue such an aggressive anti-abortion bill highlights an attack on bodily autonomy rooted in gender and racial oppression (*Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt* 2016).

Jackson's attitude toward abortion clinics was shaped by personal testimonies from women who experienced complications after their abortions and had to call 911 for emergency assistance (Jackson 2020). She condemned the circumstances of this situation, as the patient was left completely disconnected from the abortion provider and forced to seek treatment from a new provider who may not know the patient's full medical history at a new emergency clinic or hospital. During consideration of the policy, testimonies of abortion complications and hemorrhaging during the Louisiana legislative sessions questioned the integrity and safety of abortion clinics as people sought abortions at these centers. Jackson's use of personal narrative omitted key details and used jarring stories to downplay the role of religion in shaping abortion policies that impede safe and accessible care.

Despite Jackson's description of abortion as a dangerous and unethical procedure, the mortality rate for abortions has remained at 0.7 deaths per 100,000 abortions for the last two decades (Roberts and White 2016). Jackson's authoring of Act 620 acknowledged yet disregarded the law's potential to force women into seeking late-term or illegal abortions, which increased maternal death risks. Despite using these risks to appeal to Black female voters, her actions contradicted her own rhetoric by supporting a bill that restricted access to care (Siegel 2020). By highlighting negative experiences about clinics, Act 620 was passed in the legislative session, signifying the enactment of a pro-life bill effectively confining the rights of birthing people.

Legal Challenges and Constitutional Concerns: The Fallout of Louisiana Act 620

On September 1, 2014, former Governor Bobby Jindal passed Louisiana Act 620, setting a harmful precedent for restrictive abortion laws for the country because its enactment signified a disregard for prior legislation that protected the right to an abortion (Allsbrook and Ellmann 2020). During the 2014 legislative session, Senator Jackson successfully asserted that admitting privileges were necessary for the safety of the patients despite the total abortion-related complication rate, including pain, bleeding, infection, or more severe, hemorrhage, uterine perforation, or injuries to adjacent organs, to be estimated at 2% (Sajadi-Ernazarova and Martinez 2023) Senator Jackson

³ Americans United for Life is an anti-abortion law firm and advocacy group founded in 1971. The mission of the group states that their team works to advance the human right to life in culture, law and policy. Additionally, Dorinda Bordlee is a pro-life attorney who represented Bioethics Defense Fund, a public interest organization that addressed bioethics issues, including abortion, healthcare rights of the conscience, and embryonic stem cell research, as a Senior Counsel. Bordlee has devoted her law practice to the sanctity of life constitutional issues.

voiced concerns for the well-being of pregnant individuals in the hands of abortion clinics, framing the policy as a measure to protect the birthing person's health. In response to critics who stated that she was limiting access to abortion, Jackson claimed that "[Act 620] doesn't lessen access to an abortion, it lessens access to unsafe abortion, and unsafe, unregulated abortions are not constitutional" (Jackson 2020, n.p.).

Shortly after the enactment of Louisiana Act 620, legal issues arose, as opponents of the bill stated that the law imposed an undue burden on access to reproductive options. On August 22, 2014, Bossier Medical Suite, Causeway Clinic, and Hope Medical Group for Women, along with two anonymous abortion doctors under the Center for Reproductive Rights, filed a lawsuit against the state of Louisiana's admitting privileges law (United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit 2018). The Center for Reproductive Rights initially proposed the lawsuit under the name *June Medical Services LLC v. Gee*, which sought to illustrate the undue burden on abortion clinics as two of the five remaining clinics from the mass closure of clinics across the state due to Act 620 felt the strain of bill as they tried to keep their doors open (Center for Reproductive Rights 2020). The Center for Reproductive Rights expressed their concerns about the willingness of physicians to provide abortion care due to the punishable measures under Act 620, including imprisonment, fines, and civil liability (Center for Reproductive Rights 2020).

The U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana issued a Temporary Restraining Order on the law, deeming it an unconstitutional undue burden on abortion access. Senator Jackson posed the law as advocacy for proper credentials to ensure high-quality medical care, yet it hindered the patients' ability to access clinics, as they were forced to close due to financial and legal logistics imposed by Act 620 (Hadavi 2020). The District Court ruled that the bill did not advocate for the health or safety of birthing people with the restrictive vetting process of physicians seeking admitting privileges outlined in Act 620 (Center for Reproductive Rights 2020). The District Court referenced the safety of abortions across the nation and a lack of prevalence of severe complications that would require strict admitting privileges (Center for Reproductive Rights 2020). The layers of restrictions made it incredibly difficult for clinics to get proper licensing to operate, which took time and resources away from a clinic's ability to care for patients (Roberts and White 2016). Providers struggled to obtain admitting privileges due to stringent criteria, including insufficient patients requiring emergency transport, a lack of staff for hospital-based surgeries or a hospital's concerns about legal risks or religious objections (Congressional Research Services 2020). The District Court decided that the admitting privileges law was not relevant to the care of patients and did not offer significant health benefits to the birthing population. The Court stated that the law would hinder the number of Louisiana physicians capable of performing abortions, which would put a strain on clinics across the state, concluding that the law was unconstitutional (Congressional Research Services 2020).

The District Court's decision halted Jackson's bill in its tracks, but the financial implications and time-intensive nature of gaining admitting privileges across the state were worrisome, as "eight abortion clinics closed in the months prior to the law's effective date...[and] Another 11 clinics closed on the day the law took effect (were already forced to close their doors (*June Medical Services v. Russo* 2020, 13). Jackson needed to decide: would she continue to defend her bill and fight for what she deemed a law for maternal health and protection, or cut her losses and admit defeat to her own party?

Political Crossroads

Abortion advocates quickly targeted Jackson for the lack of protection provided in the wake of Act 620, promoting conversations about amending the bill to lessen the stringent stipulations. The framing of the bill did not address problems like the “increase [of] the administrative burden of operating a clinic, and therefore also the cost in terms of staffing, resources, and the strain on what are small medical offices” (Schilling 2020, n.p.). The initial turmoil around Act 620 emerged in late 2014, potentially becoming a pivotal factor in Jackson’s attempt to maintain power during her 2016 reelection for Representative. One option was for Jackson to take the opportunity to amend the bill in hopes of coming to a consensus with the plaintiffs. The updated bill would then return to the District Court for their reassessment of its constitutionality. Compromising would be advantageous for Jackson as it would allow her to push her bill into motion while lessening the threat of the Center for Reproductive Rights fighting her bill. Jackson’s potential willingness to shift on her anti-abortion stance could resonate with left-leaning voters who support safe access to abortion but were alarmed by how the bill missed the mark on protecting maternal health.

Anti-abortion policies forced people to give birth with no concessions despite Louisiana having the second-highest maternal mortality rate in the country. The conversation about access to abortion services in Jackson’s Act 620 was deeply intertwined with the pro-life movement, which neglected the role of poverty, racism, and lack of government support for marginalized communities. In particular, Black women are three to four times more likely to die in childbirth (Harris 2024). Additionally, Black women made up a shocking 68% of women who died from pregnancy-related deaths between 2011 and 2016 (Center for Reproductive Rights 2018). Jackson was preoccupied with the “19 million Black babies that have been killed in the womb from abortion,” despite having the power and privilege to pass legislation that could address gaps in Black maternal healthcare, like deaths associated with birth due to lack of prenatal care (Jackson 2014, n.p.). Instead of leaning into her identity as a Black woman to address these shock statistics, her legislation revolved around her identity as a Christian.

On the other hand, lessening the admitting privileges bill to win over the plaintiffs could jeopardize Jackson’s relationship with Louisiana Right to Life and associated voters. After her election to Louisiana House of Representatives in 2011, Jackson’s seat was up for reelection every four years. Senator Jackson claimed 51% of votes in the District 16 Primaries, with the Republican candidate, Samuel Jackson, at 25.6% of votes (Louisiana House of Representatives Elections 2011).⁴ While the incumbent position gave Jackson an advantage, the proposal to segregate the school districts was rejected in 2014, which could have soiled the once-positive sentiments toward Jackson. The families that banded together to create Southeast Community School District did not drop their racially charged proposition but, instead, redirected their efforts to separate into two precincts in the name of Fire Department districting issues, forming the new St. George Parish after working their way up to the Supreme Court. The racially-charged positionality of her White constituents and other right-leaning supporters hung in the balance, which could be solidified by standing by Act 620’s side, appealing to voters who support pro-life legislation.

⁴ District 16 includes sections of Baton Rouge and Inniswold, Oak Hills Place, Village St. George, and Westminster. The voter demographics comprises approximately 66% Black voters, 44% White voters, 68% Democrat, and 32% Republican, and is considered a primarily urban area (Louisiana Secretary of State Statewide Report of Registered Voters 2014).

Senator Jackson's maintenance of her good standing with Former Governor Bel Edwards would be pivotal for her election in the Senate of 2016, as he was a proponent of the success of her campaign. The Former Governor strongly affiliated with Jackson's commitment to pursuing anti-abortion legislation as one of the co-signers on the letter to the Democratic National Committee under Democrats for Life, urging the Democratic party to lean towards a pro-life policy stance (DFLA 2020). Former Governor Bel Edwards was the first to sign Act 620, which could question her loyalty to the Governor and jeopardize her unrestricted ability to pass pro-life legislation as a Democrat (McGill 2018). Even if abandoning the bill made Jackson more favorable to the Democratic Party, she would still face uncertainties from her right-leaning constituents in her commitments to being a whole-life Democrat. If Jackson lost the backing of Former Governor Bel Edwards, her likeability within the greater Democratic party could be jeopardized.

Jackson also had the choice to charge forward with her bill and continue to back her commitment to being a "whole-life Democrats,"... [and] take special interest in ensuring protection of human life from the time of conception to the time of death" (Jackson 2014, n.p.). Jackson showed Louisiana abortion clinics that she was willing to chip away at the precedent set by *Roe v. Wade* through her deeply rooted Christian morals that drove her legislative choices. She asserted that her loyalty to her law is rooted in "The word of God says in all things give honor to him and acknowledge him in all thy ways — and so every day of my life my faith leads me, because there's not an area in my life where I do not depend on him" (Jackson 2020, n.p.). By continuing to back her case, Jackson could take the opportunity to reassert her stance as a devout Christian and policymaker willing to go all in to ensure that policy was passed. As a policymaker who chooses to fiercely challenge precedent, Jackson could be a key player in the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, which would legitimize her career and commitment to the anti-abortion cause.

Conclusion

Senator Jackson's dilemma highlights the tension between Jackson's religious beliefs, political alliances, and the consequences of her legislative actions on the constituents she represents in Louisiana. Jackson faces her life-long commitment to her Christian faith and staying true to her morals of defending human life from conception to death. Senator Jackson must weigh the risk and reward of pushing away the Democratic party while also playing to the interests of conservative pro-life voters to ensure their support as she sought reelection. Beyond the bill's outcome, as a politician, Senator Jackson was forced to consider her conflicting identities at play to ensure that she stayed in the running for future elections in Louisiana.

Epilogue

Jackson's commitment to her faith and desire to adhere to her "constituents voted resoundingly to stand with life" to loyally fight for Act 620 until the Supreme Court struck it down on June 29, 2020 (Jackson 2020, n.p.). In the weeks leading up to the enactment of Act 620, eight abortion clinics closed. Another 11 clinics closed on the day the law took effect. Following the enactment, the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana granted the Temporary Restraining Order on the law as it was deemed an unconstitutional undue burden on abortion access. This initial block was brought to the attention of the Fifth Court, who picked up the case to assess whether the Temporary Restraining Order was warranted. The Fifth Court explained that the Act 620 did not underscore precedent to the extent of the Texas law, supporting Senator Katrina's assertion that "In Texas, their law was new, and it only applied to abortion, stating "We're not the same at all; we've had this admitting-privileges law on the books for every other

outpatient or elective patient procedure that has occurred in an ambulatory surgical center because those centers do not have emergency care onsite” (Jackson 2014, n.p.). This narrative undermines the role of anti-abortion sentiments that fueled Jackson’s conceptualization of Act 620 during its inception. The Fifth Court’s decision to remove the block of Act 620 indicated the state’s support of anti-abortion legislation, regardless of its constitutionality.

The testimonies in the legislative sessions and policy framework that Senator Jackson created affirmed the Fifth Court’s assertion that Act 620 “plainly evidences an intent to promote women’s health. Specifically, the Act seeks to accomplish that goal by ensuring a higher level of physician competence and by requiring continuity of care,” (United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit 2018, 5). The Fifth Court’s decision to reinstate Act 620 harmed the state of reproductive care options, driving clinics to close their doors due to inability to afford the necessary paperwork for admitting privileges. Administrator Kathaleen Pittman at Hope Medical Group for Women, one of the only clinics remaining in Louisiana, remarked on the pressure of keeping their doors open with an overwhelming influx of patients, stating that “The difficult part for many people to understand is that it pushes care for Louisiana women aside and delays care for them too. We’re just so limited. There are just so many people we can see at a given moment” (Chavez 2013). The Court’s decision to proceed with the case instead of sticking to established protections of abortion clinics highlighted the unapologetic willingness of Louisiana to shut down clinics and limit access to abortion at any cost (Ford Foundation 2020).

The Center for Reproductive Rights requested a rehearing, but the Fifth Circuit denied it in January 2019. The case against Act 620 was then picked up as *June Medical Services v. Russo* by the Supreme Court, which issued a temporary hold on the Louisiana law in February 2019 as it awaited trial at the Supreme Court (Svokos 2020). The Supreme Court ultimately decided in favor of June Medical Group, asserting that the “State’s unmistakable concession of standing as part of its effort to obtain a quick decision from the District Court on the merits of the plaintiffs’ undue-burden claims” (*June Medical Services v. Russo* 2020, 2). The Supreme Court found that Act 620 violated precedence in the Texas HB2 Bill and aspects of *Roe v. Wade*, which underscored the unconstitutionality of Act 620 despite the Fifth Court originally upholding the Act after initial mass closures of abortion clinics across the state of Louisiana.

Senator Jackson quickly addressed the Supreme Court’s decision, stating her disappointment and claiming that the court “prioritized their preferences over the clear will of the people, of my great state,” despite overwhelming support from her constituents, including “women and men, dem and repro, black legislators, and white legislatures” alike (Jackson 2020, n.p.). She warned that the overturning of the Fifth Circuit’s decision and effectively dismantling Act 620 would put women in danger from abortion-related injuries.

However, Act 620 created barriers to reproductive care that threatened the well-being of birthing individuals by restricting provider options, increasing travel costs and wait times, and adding fear to an already distressing situation. Despite Jackson’s claims that Act 620 aimed to ensure safe abortions, the policy instead effected the closure of four of five remaining abortion clinics after the initial wave of closures from the enactment in 2014. Act 620 did not address the need for patient-centered reproductive healthcare policies but instead, resulted in the “drastic reduction in the number and geographic distribution of abortion providers” (*June Medical Services v. Russo* 2020, 13).

Senator Jackson won an unopposed election in late 2019 to represent the newly redistricted District 34 in the Louisiana State Senate, succeeding term-limited Democrat Francis Thompson. The redistricting resulted from an attempt to promote partisanship across the state. *June Medical*

Services v. Russo deemed Louisiana Act 620 unconstitutional on June 29, 2020. Jackson's decision to stick by Act 620 "came from listening to the stories of women hurt by abortions as [she] sat on the Louisiana Health and Welfare Committee ... with a decades-long history of unsanitary conditions and substandard medical care" (Jackson 2020, n.p.). Jackson had previously attributed her strong stance on pro-life policies on her religious affiliation, citing "the word of God" fueling her decision-making, but in her speech in 2020, she abandoned her religious ties and instead, restated her commitment to her community. Jackson rhetoric of "stand[ing] together because my state loves life, Louisiana protects life—the life of both the woman and the life of her unborn child," but not directly mentioning her faith indicates a shift in appealing to her constituents, both right and left-leaning voters by downplaying the significance of religion in her policies (Jackson 2020, n.p.). Jackson successfully rewrote the narrative of the overturning of Act 620 by redirecting her attention to the needs of her new district. Jackson proposed a series of pro-life bills in the following months, but she was focused on appealing to small businesses, healthcare workers, and schools with the onset of COVID-19 concerns (Jackson 2020).

When Senator Jackson went up for election in a new district in 2020, her identity as a Black female who was committed to representing the social issues of the public served as her heart of her public-facing identity, shifting to appeal to the rural communities of District 34, who were preoccupied with educational gaps and profit from the agricultural industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Jackson played into her role as a traditional Democrat with priorities combating financial inequalities, through legislation that directed funds and resources to bridge gaps that the rural communities faced. Jackson's ability to shift to appeal to the needs of District 34 in Northern Louisiana showcased her ability to lean into her conflicting identities to be more likable (Senator Katrina Jackson Biography). Despite her struggles to travel throughout the parish, she focused on addressing concerns with the effectiveness of online learning during COVID-19 and legitimizing constituents in the agricultural industry to appeal to her voters (Jackson 2023). Jackson's commitment to defending her district and shifting her identity to put forth the parts of herself that most appeal to her voters enabled her to continue gaining traction in Louisiana's legislative sector. Jackson needed to retain the approval of her voters as she looked ahead to reelection in 2028 without Governor John Bel Edwards in her back pocket.

Senator Jackson is one of many who grapple with multiple identities in a position of power. The division between Republicans and Democrats on various issues, including government involvement, race, and environmental concerns, has polarized the parties (Pew Research Center 2017). The tension between the parties has made elements of a politician's identity even more critical for their appeal to voters. Even when Jackson focused on different aspects of her identity for a campaign or interview, she stuck true to her assertion that she is a "Black, female, Democrat, fighting for life. Because I am a Christian first" (Jackson 2019, n.p.).

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