

Obama Condemns Supreme Court Decision in Child Rape Case

Barack Obama criticized the Supreme Court's 5-4 decision today striking down the use of the death penalty in cases of child rape.

Barack Obama speaks with reporters during a news conference in Chicago Wednesday. (AP)

"I disagree with the decision. I have said repeatedly that I think that the death penalty should be applied in very narrow circumstances for the most egregious of crimes," Obama told reporters at a press conference in Chicago.

The expected Democratic nominee said he believed the rape of a child "is a heinous crime" that fits the circumstance, siding with the four conservative justices who sit on the court, Chief Justice John Roberts, and Justices Samuel Alito, Antonin Scalia, and Clarence Thomas.

Obama, like Alito, disagreed with the decision because its impact would mean a blanket prohibition on the use of the death penalty. In his dissension, Alito wrote that the decision means the death penalty would not apply "no matter how young the child, no matter how many times the child is raped, no matter how many children the perpetrator rapes, no matter how sadistic the crime, no matter how much physical or psychological trauma is inflicted, and no matter how heinous the perpetrator's prior criminal record may be."

Expected Republican nominee John McCain also disagreed with the court's decision. "Today's Supreme Court ruling is an assault on law enforcement's efforts to punish these heinous felons for the most despicable crime," he said in a statement, "That there is a judge anywhere in America who does not believe that the rape of a child represents the most heinous of crimes, which is deserving of the most serious of punishments, is profoundly disturbing."

Obama's criticism and alliance with the court's conservative judges may come as a surprise to some Democrats, but the Illinois senator has made notable steps toward the center of the political spectrum in recent weeks. (For more on that, read this story in Tuesday's Wall Street Journal.)

The Illinois senator may also have side-stepped a Michael Dukakis moment. In an infamous presidential debate, The 1988 Democratic nominee was asked if he believed the death penalty would be appropriate if his own wife was raped and murdered. "No, I don't, and I think you know that I've opposed the death penalty during all of my life," Dukakis said. His response caused his poll numbers to drop overnight, and it is believed to have contributed to his landslide defeat against George H.W. Bush.