

US Supreme Court to Consider Immigration, Civil Rights and Abortion Cases

By Jim Malone
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Legal challenges involving immigration, civil rights, abortion, and global warming are on the agenda this year as the U.S. Supreme Court opens its annual term.



AP Photo

High court sits for a new group photograph in this March 3, 2006, file photo, at Supreme Court Building in Washington

The nine-member high court begins the new session with a focus on immigration law and whether immigrants convicted of drug crimes should be deported. The court's ruling in this area could affect 7,000 similar cases around the country.

The Supreme Court will also look again at the divisive issue of abortion. The justices will consider a federal ban on a procedure known as partial-birth abortion. The law was passed by Congress in 2003, but was later struck down by lower courts.

Civil rights will also come before the high court in two cases that focus on school-desegregation efforts in Kentucky and Washington State designed to increase racial diversity.

The court will also deal with a number of cases affecting business and commerce, including the issue of punitive damages awarded to the family of a cigarette smoker who sued a tobacco company.

Legal expert Jonathan Franklin previewed the court's upcoming term for reporters at the **Washington Legal Foundation.**

"This term, I think, we have some real blockbusters on the docket," he said. "The punitive damages cases [including one against the tobacco industry], the other business cases, also the abortion cases, which involve a prior precedent [ruling] of the court and the school voluntary [racial] desegregation cases, which I think are going to be very interesting to see how the court resolves those."

The high court will also take up the issue of global warming and whether the government should attempt to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from cars.

Many legal experts predict the Supreme Court could tilt in a more conservative direction given President Bush's recent appointees, Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito.

But Chief Justice Roberts told the C-SPAN public affairs



Justice Samuel Alito, left, stands with Chief Justice John Roberts outside US Supreme Court in this Feb. 16, 2006, file photo

network that public faith in the Supreme Court remains strong because it bases its decisions on the law, not politics.

"That is one way that our Constitution is different from a lot of others," he said. "In many countries that have constitutions, they are really just political documents. The [U.S.] Constitution is a political document. It sets up the political structures, but it is also a law, and if it is a law, we have the courts to tell what it means and that is binding on the other branches [of government, president and Congress]."

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear more than 30 cases for the new term. Traditionally, the high court only takes about one percent of the cases it is asked to hear.

