

NATIONAL POST

MP wants vote on sex-selective abortion; Proposed motion was deemed out of order in House

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OTTAWA . A Conservative MP who wants parliamentarians to condemn sex-selection abortions is refusing to back down after his motion was deemed out of order last week by a House of Commons committee.

Mark Warawa is urging MPs to reverse that decision and allow a vote in the Commons on the issue. He will plead his case on Wednesday to the Commons' procedural affairs committee.

He has the support of some other Tory MPs, who are now expressing concern that their parliamentary rights are being infringed in a dangerous precedent that could make other contentious motions "non-votable."

Moreover, the development has raised speculation Prime Minister Stephen Harper's office was behind the move last Thursday at a Commons subcommittee. Mr. Harper has publicly said he will not reopen the abortion debate, and there have long been internal divisions within the Conservative caucus over the issue.

Mr. Warawa made his proposal last fall after the Commons rejected another Tory MP's motion on reviewing the country's legal definition of when life begins.

Mr. Warawa, a supporter of that motion, promptly put forward a motion for an eventual vote: "That the House condemn discrimination against females occurring through sex-selective pregnancy termination."

In an interview Monday, he said he was motivated by mounting evidence that in Canada, people are using ultrasounds to determine the gender of a fetus and to have it aborted if it is a girl.

He said it was a horrible example of discrimination against girls and women - before birth, and later in life.

He said his non-binding motion was not about reopening a national debate on abortion legislation, but rather providing a strong statement about sex-selection abortion.

"It's to say that this is wrong, that girls have equal value."

The NDP has said it would vote against the motion because it doesn't trust the government on abortion. The Liberals said they wouldn't force MPs to vote one way, but interim Liberal Leader Bob Rae said he'd vote against it.

Mr. Warawa said he was "shocked" by the unanimous decision last Thursday of a three-person subcommittee composed of MPs from the Conservatives, Liberals and NDP.

He said that even though an analyst from the Library of Parliament told the subcommittee that it was within federal jurisdiction, the MPs decided his motion was non-votable - in part because health care falls within provincial jurisdiction.

Some were surprised the Tory MP on the subcommittee joined the opposition parties in blocking the motion.

Mr. Warawa tweeted the MPs "broke rules today."

"Were they forced and by who?" he asked.

Mary Ellen Douglas, of Campaign Life Coalition, which advocates for an abortion law, said: "It's an attack on democracy.

"It's the most crazy situation going on there. There's absolute fear of facing a reality in Canada. And the reality is that babies are dying by abortion."

Andrea Mrozek, executive director of the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, said there are "no clear reasons" why Mr. Warawa's motion should have been blocked.

She believes the motion should be allowed and MPs should vote for it, adding that she suspects the prime minister's office was involved.

"I think there's pressure that comes from the top on this issue."

Also, she said the opposition parties are "desperate" to block the motion because they want to avoid the embarrassment of voting against it in the Commons.

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