

CALGARY  HERALD

An abortion law we can all choose to support

by Andrea Mrozek, published November 2, 2010

We've hit a new point in the abortion debate. This is good news for a conversation frequently called a dialogue of the deaf (and not without reason).

Pro-choice advocates are concerned that choice is threatened. And so it may be, just not in the way they think. Today, many women facing unplanned pregnancy feel pressure to choose abortion. We need to empower them with the ability to choose not to. Conservative MP Rod Bruinooge's new private member's bill, Bill C-510 (Roxanne's Law) would help.

Since many will be incredulous at the notion that women couldn't say no to abortion, let's examine the lay of the land in Canada.

All but the most fanatical of abortion supporters acknowledge we have broad access, and that women are not impeded from getting abortions anywhere.

Women can get abortions at any point throughout the nine months of pregnancy, a fact that an Angus Reid poll in July 2010 showed only 21 per cent of Canadians know. (Statistics Canada indicates 12.1 per cent of abortions are done after 13 weeks.)

When studies arise indicating that abortion has negative repercussions, the media doesn't publicize them. For example, a pro-choice psychologist in New Zealand, Dr. David Fergusson, reported in 2006 that women who abort are at three times greater risk of mental health problems than women who give birth. After controlling for more variables he got a similar result in 2008. European studies show higher suicide rates for women who abort compared to women who deliver and American studies show increased drug and alcohol use post-abortion.

Finally, university administrations censor students who disagree. Most recently, Carleton University students who attempted to display anti-abortion materials on their own campus were arrested for trespassing. University of Calgary pro-life students too, have been charged with trespassing and hauled before an academic misconduct board.

Most women will not be savagely beaten, stuffed in the trunk of a car and then dumped in a snow bank and left to die for refusing to have an abortion, as 24-year-old Roxanne Fernando was in February 2007. But the presence of a soft coercion toward abortion is the norm, not the exception.

Take "Nadia" (not her real name), who at 22 was brought to the hospital emergency department by her brother. She had overdosed on 20 tranquillizer pills. The day before she'd had an

abortion in a private clinic. She was deeply ambivalent about the abortion; her boyfriend was adamant it was the right thing to do.

There are even those who report similar stories from the pro-choice side. Antichoice is anti-awesome is the blog of a volunteer co-ordinator at an abortion clinic in New Brunswick. In February 2010, she wrote about a woman who was being forced to abort by her parents. "The patient clearly did not want to have an abortion; while in to have her ultrasound she freaked out about the finger prick test, and then told the nurse, her mother and anyone who would listen that it was a blessing to be pregnant, a beautiful gift from God," she writes.

It takes a special strength and courage to say no to abortion in face of pressure from a boyfriend, from parents and from society at large. (Our tax dollars fund Planned Parenthood, not crisis pregnancy centres.)

New Democrat health critic Megan Leslie told the media over the weekend with regards to Bill C-510 that "if we can open that door even a crack to this idea of fetal rights -- which in my opinion promotes anti-choice ideas -- that has an impact on women's rights and freedoms when it comes to the very personal decision about abortion." What Leslie seems to want is a freeze on freedom of thought.

Meanwhile, the same Angus Reid poll cited above also shows that 81 per cent of women and 77 per cent of men think their provincial health authority should demand that all health-care workers offer information about alternatives to abortion, such as adoption and counselling for pregnant women.

Many women who experience an unplanned pregnancy would keep the child if they thought they had support -- physical, financial or emotional. And all too often that is absent. "It's your choice," is just another way of saying "I don't care."

No law can prevent the myriad soft coercions that push a woman toward abortion. But Roxanne's Law is a small voice empowering at least some women who, in the face of overwhelming odds and even violence, choose to say no. That's a choice we can all support.

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