

Government Orders

• (1540)

The Canada Health Act does not list specific medical services, so the individual provinces specify services to be available and specify access to those services. The absence of federal law could lead to critical variations across Canada in the provision of abortion services.

For example, one province's policy could be the exact opposite of that of a neighbouring province when dealing with abortion. It is my opinion that doing nothing was not an option.

Bill C-43 makes abortion a criminal offence unless the pregnancy would likely be a threat to the life or health of the woman, health considerations to include mental, physical and psychological health. The law undoubtedly places a large responsibility on Canada's medical community because such a determination would be based upon the opinion of a single practitioner.

However, I have great faith in the physicians of Canada. The Canadian Medical Association has developed policies on abortion. It has spent much time in debate developing those policies and I believe that association can be depended upon to act in the best interests of their patients.

As well, the decision to have an abortion must be an agonizing one for a woman. I say "must" because I cannot as a man purport to know what a woman goes through in making such a decision. However, as a legislator, I do know that we as a society cannot and must not send women who have or seek abortions to jail. Society must instead work toward a time when abortions are not required or are not even desired.

Abortion must not be dealt with as an isolated issue. Abortion solves no problems. In fact, it could create many new ones. Related and supportive social policy must be developed concurrently with any abortion legislation.

I am, therefore, pleased that a royal commission on new reproductive technology will study the causes, treatment and prevention of infertility, sterilization reversals and other reproductive health issues. As well, the Minister of National Health and Welfare has announced \$500,000 per year over the next three years for research into family planning issues, including contraception and fertility problems.

At the same time, federal and provincial governments must continue to develop new policies and programs dealing with family violence, child sexual abuse and child care and must meet the challenge to address the problem of unwanted pregnancies. Of course, ultimately, the search for a better society rests with our young people. They must be provided with information and education so that they can hopefully avoid the mistakes that we have made.

The citizens of Canada expect leadership from their government. I believe that has been provided with the introduction of Bill C-43. Of course, it is impossible, considering the emotional feelings on both sides of this important issue, to develop a law that will satisfy everyone. As well, it would be fruitless to have a law that would not survive a court challenge under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I could never have supported a bill that based access to abortion on the gestational model. Such an idea I find abhorrent. The logical extension of society's recognition of the increasing value of a developing foetus is to place less value on a life as it ages.

Therefore, I intend to support Bill C-43 at second reading. It does not totally reflect my own personal anti-abortion feelings. However, as a legislator, I feel duty bound to work toward developing laws that are constitutionally acceptable and will meet with the approval of tolerant and thoughtful Canadians. I feel that Bill C-43 accomplishes that purpose.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, over the decade during which I have had the privilege of sitting in this House, there have been many moments in which the House of Commons has risen to an occasion where it provided a sense of direction for the country and responded in a sometimes quite magnificent way to expectations, hopes and aspirations. Unfortunately, this is not one of those times.

It is a great sadness and disappointment to many Canadians that on an issue that affects so many of them in so many ways, that reaches into family life in such a profound way, the Parliament of Canada is not giving this country the kind of leadership that it requires. In this, I agree with the member from Dauphin—Swan River who just spoke.