

Government Orders

individual. Governments should not be allowed to interfere.

The legislation before us today does nothing to resolve the bitter polarity surrounding the issue of abortion. It is intellectually dishonest and it is politically fraudulent. It gives the appearance that the government is doing something about the issue and in reality it is doing nothing to tackle the very essence of the problem. It does nothing to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and to support the unwanted children who continue to suffer in society today.

Our efforts in resolving the controversy of abortion have been futile, largely because we have been tackling the problem from the wrong dimension. To circumvent the need for abortion should always be the ultimate goal. Consensus can only be reached by focusing on the preventive side of the issue. The aim of education, research and social action must always be to reduce the incidence of abortion and to promote effective contraception. We must also involve the development of national programs, of counselling and support for those women who have decided to see their pregnancy to term.

The reality is that 56 per cent of single parent families in Canada live at or below the poverty line, and while one woman in four is sexually active by the age of 15, fewer than 10 per cent of North American teenagers use birth control when they first become sexually active. Despite these harsh realities, the national division of health and welfare has only one full-time worker in its family planning division.

We have failed miserably as a nation to provide a framework of support so necessary to allow women to make responsible decisions. Establishing effective preventive programs through our health, educational and social service agencies will do much to decrease future demands for abortions. This has to be combined with adequately funded support and counselling services for women facing an unwanted pregnancy. It is our collective responsibility to do all we can to help.

May I conclude by saying that in the final analysis the decision of whether or not to terminate a pregnancy

must be left to the woman. It must remain hers to choose the path which she alone must walk.

• (1840)

Mr. Rob Nicholson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, usually when I have the privilege of speaking in this House I mention how pleased I am to speak on the bill before Parliament. Tonight I am not so much pleased as I am aware of the difficulties of this subject for all members of Parliament, including myself.

This is the second reading stage of Bill C-43. We are being asked to approve in principle a new law on abortion. The bill does not reflect my personal point of view. I have opposed abortion since I was a teenager and since that time I have worked and spoken out on behalf of protecting unborn children. I have spoken twice before on this subject in the House of Commons and it is not my intention at this point to repeat the arguments that I have made as to why I want protection for the unborn. I think it will suffice for me to say that for me this is a deeply held conviction.

I said this subject is difficult for parliamentarians. It is difficult because I know there is no consensus in Canada. I and many who share my point of view have tried to build that consensus but, for many reasons, it does not exist.

This Parliament now has the unenviable task of trying to reconcile two very divergent points of view, both, in many cases, passionately held. I do not know the words that could be put down on paper that could completely satisfy both sides of the issue.

Therefore, those of us who are deeply committed to the pro-life position have a decision to make. On the face of it, it would seem that the decision is straightforward because this piece of legislation does not reflect my point of view and, therefore, it would seem simple to say that I must vote against it. But, and this is why it is difficult, there are other considerations to take into account.