

*Abortion*

I made a declaration when I ran for Parliament in 1984 that I stood for the preservation of life and that I opposed abortion on demand. Now that the highest court in the land has spoken, the door is open for legislation which strikes a balance between the rights of the expectant mother and those of the unborn child.

My duty, as I see it, is twofold. First it is to work for the reduction of the number of abortions by reducing the demand for them and second, it is to deal with the availability question through appropriate legislation which would preserve and protect as many unborn lives as possible.

Notwithstanding my declared position on the issue, I took it upon myself earlier this year to ascertain the views of my constituents. I concede that this is not a statistically valid survey in that only those who are interested in the issue chose to respond. This survey is based on a sample of 2,319 responses.

Should abortion be available on demand: yes, 47 per cent; no, 48 per cent; not sure, 3 per cent. Should the mother's rights prevail over those of the unborn child: yes, 53 per cent; no, 36 per cent; not sure, 6 per cent. Should all unborn children have legal status: yes, 38 per cent; no, 47 per cent; not sure, 10 per cent. Should the law recognize that both the mother and the unborn have some rights: yes, 61 per cent; no, 27 per cent; not sure, 9 per cent. So we see that there is profound division on the issue.

Now the question arises: if abortions are restricted, what will be the consequences? I received in my office not long ago a letter from a distinguished Edmonton pathologist, Dr. T. A. Kasper, and I will quote briefly from it. He writes:

As a pathologist, I feel it is my duty to advise you of some very misleading statements that I have heard vocalized by a variety of pro-abortion activists . . .

The most deceptive statement of all goes something like this. "Before abortion on demand, there were 30,000 or 40,000 women dying every year as a result of botched up back alley abortions"...I worked for over ten years performing or supervising autopsies in the busiest morgue in the City of Edmonton . . .

Over that time, I personally could not recall a single case of a death due to an illegal abortion.

That statement of Dr. Kasper appears to be borne out by a study conducted by Ian Gentles of the Human Life Research Institute which concluded the following:

Maternal deaths from abortion declined steadily from 1940 or earlier. The legalization of abortion in the late 1960s had little effect upon a trend that had already been established for over a quarter of a century. It was not legalization but improved treatment of infection that virtually eliminated abortion deaths between 1940 and 1980.

I intend to follow this debate very carefully. I intend to listen to the arguments that are made. I intend to study all the amendments which are before us.

Like my colleague from Duvernay, I am attracted in a way to the amendment put forward by the Hon. Member for Kitchener (Mr. Reimer). I think that that is perhaps where many of us will end up. I intend, though, to see whether there is not a way to have a more restrictive law, but hand in hand

with that law I think must go some clear, valid and funded alternatives to the choice of abortion which I suspect most women undertake as a last resort.

Our society does not provide adequate resources to see a woman through to the end of a pregnancy, a single woman particularly, an abandoned woman, a woman who may already have a number of dependants of her own. Our attitudes, to be honest, do not sustain that woman either. However, I am somewhat reassured by correspondence I have received from a distinguished lawyer in my constituency who practises family law. She tells me that the demand for children by would-be adoptive parents is such that the normal channels are not satisfying the demand. Indeed, those who have waited four to five years for adoptive children are now seeking the private route rather than the public route.

I find that the main motion does not satisfy the issue. The main motion is couched in the kind of moral relativism that the 1969 law is couched in. Only if we recognize and embrace a broader, positive social agenda for enhancing procreative choice can we begin to find lines of strategy that will simultaneously bring about both less reliance on abortion and less resort to coercion of women and enforced childbearing.

I believe we should not be seeking a legal compromise but that we should be looking for a truly moral solution.

● (0230)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Carole Jacques (Montreal—Mercier):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to speak on abortion, a very difficult and sensitive subject and one that has provoked a great deal of controversy. Abortion is a very personal choice, which belongs to the woman, who often finds herself faced with a decision that cannot be reconciled with her religion, her moral values, her family life and her convictions.

Mr. Speaker, as parliamentarians we have to make a decision that will affect the rights of women as well as the rights of the foetus, and we must try to balance those rights.

The motion before this House approaches the problem from three angles. There is the pro-life angle, formally forbidding abortion even when the health or life of the mother is at stake. It is certainly a right-to-life position, Mr. Speaker. But what about the rights of the woman when her health is in danger? I think this position has lost its relevance in the evolution of our free and democratic society. We are no longer in an archaic society. That position would take us back to the quacks and the knitting needles.

The second approach, from the pro-choice angle, would permit abortion at any stage of pregnancy. This position seems to me irrational. The right to life of both the woman and the foetus cannot be reconciled with a woman's being able to terminate her pregnancy at any point, for no matter what reason, good or bad.