

*Abortion*

It is interesting to look at the situation, because even in those countries where abortion has been stringently constrained, when women make the decision that they wish to pursue this course of action, they will find ways to do it. Although there are tight abortion laws in Ireland, Irish women are as likely as women in the liberal Netherlands to obtain abortions. It would be a matter of going to the United Kingdom.

To some extent we find this in Canada, and this was one of my great concerns with the old law. Indeed, I knew a young woman who had to take this course. When abortions are not available in their communities, they would have to go to the United States to obtain an abortion. I do not think that was appropriate or right. I hope that situation will change.

Some people also claim that the incidence of abortion in Canada is high and disproportionate. I would argue that. According to the last statistics, 1984-85, there were in the order of 61,000 abortions performed in Canada, 99 per cent prior to 20 weeks. Only in a very few and exceptional circumstances were abortions performed after that time.

In other countries with which we often associated ourselves as having similar standards of morality, such as England, the incidence of abortion was 33 per cent higher. In France it was 30 per cent higher, in Japan it was 75 per cent higher, and in the United States it has been twice as high.

● (1730)

I do not personally believe that should this motion pass and legislation be introduced, it would have an impact on the numbers. I believe that once a woman makes that kind of decision she will find a way. We have a responsibility to ensure that she has the facilities in which an abortion can be provided safely and under proper medical conditions and that it is covered by our health care plans.

This brings me to something about which I want to comment as a woman and as the mother of three children. I have had discussions about abortion with women I have dealt with over the years. I have talked to women who have had abortions and mothers of daughters who have had abortions. I do not think women take this issue lightly. I sometimes hear from people that abortion is used as a method of birth control. There may be times when that is done, but I think it is certainly the exception to the rule. For most women, the decision to terminate a pregnancy, to have an abortion, is a very difficult and traumatic decision. It is not one that is taken lightly. I do not think that we as a society should impose further difficulties on women so that in some cases they have to suffer the possibility of further health problems or mental health problems in terms of seeking a solution.

I would like to turn to the Supreme Court decision. Bertha Wilson in her rationale of why the old law was struck down, in my mind, went to the heart of the issue. She said:

... the decision to terminate a pregnancy ... is one that will have profound psychological, economic and social consequences for the pregnant women.

The circumstances giving rise to it can be complex and varied and there may be ... powerful considerations militating in opposite directions. It is a decision that deeply reflects the way the woman thinks about herself and her relationship to others and to society at large. It is a profound social and ethical decision. Her response to it will be the response of a whole person.

The old Section 251 put the decision in the hands of a committee and so takes away the decision that a woman has a right to make for herself without any state interference.

Judge Wilson goes on to say that Section 251 also violates the right to security because it treats the pregnant women as a passive recipient of a decision made by others as to whether her body is to be used to nurture a new life. I would certainly concur with the reasoning of Justice Bertha Wilson. I cannot comprehend any laws which take away my right to make a decision about my body, about my future. I just do not think that is right. I would ask other Members to think about that.

If women are faced with the situation of a pregnancy they do not wish to carry to term, they want to make that decision as quickly as possible. The evidence is clear. Only .3 per cent of pregnancies in Canada are carried out in the last trimester. Those are the truly exceptional cases. Perhaps we do not really need, then, to consider a gestational approach because that probably is not the issue. At the same time, however, there is this feeling in society that there should be some statement of protection of the developing foetus at a certain stage. I can accept that and would be prepared to accept some limitations on the right of a woman to make that decision in the later stages of the pregnancy. I will come to some suggestions about that in a few moments.

There is often a lot of statistics quoted about the public's view. A Gallup poll in April indicated that about 70 per cent of Canadians believe that a decision to terminate a pregnancy should be a matter of choice for the woman and her physician. That is certainly supported by a survey undertaken in my own riding. I asked the question in my householder this spring and received over 2,200 replies. That is a much larger response than I would ever have expected and is really very significant. The number of people who wrote comments, wanting to give me their views, was very heartening. It showed that the constituency of Capilano is very much in tune with the general views of Canadians. Only 12 per cent indicated that they would support legislation to prevent all abortions, but 69 per cent indicated that abortion should be a matter of choice between a woman and her doctor during the early stages of pregnancy.

Despite the strongly held views people might have on religious grounds against abortion, and I appreciate those views, I think we have to consider that the majority of Canadians believe that abortion, certainly in the earlier stages of pregnancy, should be a choice between the woman and her physician. Those who feel strongly on the other side of the question should have the right to promulgate their views, to try to encourage women to pursue other options. I would hope as well that they and all of us would pursue more options to encourage all people to be more responsible with respect to reproduction. We should be encouraging Planned Parenthood