

*Abortion*

As a legislator, what do I do about a young girl of 14, 16, 18 or 20 who for various reasons decides to have an abortion in the earlier stages of pregnancy? If I vote according to my principles and ignore the consequences of my legislation, am I not also making a mistake with some very serious social consequences? Should a young girl who is afraid of being thrown out of the house by her parents because it was incest or rape or for any other reason, a young girl who panics and decides to have an abortion in the earlier stages of pregnancy, be brought before the courts and charged with murder, with the obvious social consequences for the girl herself and her family?

Another question, Mr. Speaker. Should I as a legislator overlook the fact that U.S. border states allow abortion, no questions asked? Am I not trying to ignore the fact that a young girl who can afford it will fly to the United States, have her abortion, not say a word to anyone and come back here? While the other girl who can't afford it will go down to the basement to be cut up by God knows who, with further consequences for her own fertility and health.

As the legislator, I have to consider that as well, Mr. Speaker. I cannot afford to vote according to my principles without considering the consequences of the legislation itself. Because after all, it could be your daughter, it could be mine, it could be the daughter of any of us. But in spite of all this, we cannot afford to leave the door wide open. That would not make sense. But how to find a middle ground from which we can protect life and at the same time not go overboard with coercive discipline?

On the weekend, I was talking to constituents in my riding. I tried to visualize some amendments, and I said: Actually, if we allow abortion only for minors, in cases of incest and rape, what do we do? So the girl goes to the doctor after two months and she says: It was rape. How can that be proven? It is impossible. Whenever we try to pass equitable legislation aimed at protecting life, problems do arise. That, Mr. Speaker, is the decision which we, as legislators, must make on Thursday.

Also, it is easy for us, men, to vote on the principle, but we are not the ones who bear children. However, we do have a stake in the matter. We must promote life, but we must also pass legislation which will not create social problems of similar significance.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, when I speak about abortion, I feel very much concerned because my wife and I have adopted two children. If their mothers had had an abortion, I would have been deprived of the opportunity of adopting these children. Therefore, I also know what I am talking about because I know the importance of the issue. Unfortunately, nowadays, women too often forget that there are couples who want children and would be only too willing to adopt the children they carry. As legislators, we also have a duty to

make this possible and to improve the conditions in which the women who experience these problems find themselves.

So, Mr. Speaker, the motion before us today reads in part as follows:

Such legislation should prohibit the performance of an abortion, subject to the following exceptions:

When, during the earlier stages of pregnancy: a qualified medical practitioner is of the opinion that the continuation of the pregnancy of a woman would, or would be likely to, threaten her physical or mental well-being;

This objective, however, is flawed due to its lack of precision. We must not swing the doors wide open. It is obvious that we must be against abortion, but we must make allowance for specific conditions in which people find themselves in our society. It is in that context that I will try to analyze carefully, on Thursday, all the amendments which are proposed. As a Member of Parliament, I refuse to vote on a principle without giving any thought to the impact of this legislation. In so doing, I think that we must allow for certain options in order to make the legislation as human as possible.

[English]

**Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon):** Mr. Speaker, last January, when the Supreme Court struck down the old abortion law, the Government said it was ready to give leadership on the question. On the day after the Supreme Court decision, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) said:

"As far as our responsibilities are concerned, we intend to provide the leadership that is required on this issue.

I am reading from Don McGillivray's column of May 17:

He was going to take "a position of leadership" and "provide all Canadian citizens right across the country with a uniform approach. That is the commitment that we make at this point in time. In addition, we will be dealing with this matter on an urgent basis."

Mr. McGillivray then added:

Since then, the urgency as well as the leadership seems to have gone missing.

Instead of talking about leadership now . . .

And this was more than two months ago.

. . . the government is ducking responsibility. The prime minister says abortion is not something on which a party position is proper. The justice minister says he wants to "let the House of Commons determine the course of this matter".

Mr. McGillivray observed that:

As the Mulroney government goes into hiding on the abortion issue, it is forcing individual members of Parliament into the open.

A free vote shifts responsibility to the individual MP. He or she must take a stand on a subject the government itself considers too hot to handle.

Those comments seem to be very fair ones, with regard to the kinds of responsibility or, rather, lack of it, that the Government has shown on this issue, if it regards the matters as being important in doing what it seems to do.

What we are given this day and over the next couple of days, through extended hours of debate through the night, perhaps, is the opportunity for individual Members to express their opinions. I am reminded of the practice in the U.S. Congress where members very often want to put something on the