

*Government Orders*

me my own opinions, my own biases, and also my own concerns.

During this debate on this particular issue I have tried my very best to put my own point of view and my own positions aside and to listen to those who hold contrary opinions and to try to understand why they hold those contrary opinions. I have listened a lot. I have tried to understand how these individuals, whom I consider to be rational, caring, intelligent individuals, can be so far apart on such a fundamental issue as abortion.

I also want to say that I have attempted always not just to listen but to respect contrary opinions on the subject. I have defended and I will continue to defend the rights of individuals on all sides of this issue to have an opinion, to present that opinion and, most important, to be respected for having that opinion. Consequently, in return I ask nothing more than that same courtesy.

I must also state that I consider myself not just to be against abortion but to be in favour of protecting the lives of the unborn wherever and however possible. I do, however, understand the position of individuals who hold a contrary view, many of whom are my dear and longstanding friends. But as hard as I try, I simply cannot accept their conviction on the other side of this argument.

I am sure that most of us in this Chamber, no matter what point of view we hold on this particular debate, have been asked by individuals who hold different points of view what our point of view is.

• (1850 )

There is one thing that has bothered me, although it has not happened in this House. After being asked what my position is and saying that I am probably pro-life—although I do not like the labels that this debate has forced on many of us—many times I am immediately told that I do not have a right to have an opinion because I am not a female. I fully understand some of those sentiments. But I also know, as a father of two children, that I should have some say in the rights and the future of the unborn. Many times when I am asked my opinion it is met with hostility but many times it is met with a great deal of support.

But all of that aside, we are now in the place where a decision on this very critical piece of legislation must be made. I have listened to arguments and I suppose I am prepared to accept any bill that limits abortions to those instances where a mother's life is at risk. I suppose I am also prepared to listen to arguments concerning abortions being permitted in cases of violent crime, such as rape and incest.

I intend to support this bill at second reading solely so that it can proceed to the legislative committee for further review and to hear from Canadians on this critical issue. It is also my hope that when we do get it into committee a true debate will take place, not the type of sterile debate that many times takes place in the House, but a true exchange of ideas across a committee table as amendments are put forward, to try to make this piece of legislation which is currently, in its present form, to me unpalatable, more palatable to myself, many of my colleagues and many Canadians.

In my view this government has a responsibility to propose legislation. It was my hope as well as the hope of millions of Canadians that this House would bring in legislation that would not just address the rights of the foetus, but a bill that sought to make a statement which indicates society's interest in the rights of the foetus.

In its ruling of last January 28, the Supreme Court clearly indicated that the state has an interest in the foetus. As Chief Justice Dickson wrote:

The precise point in the development of the foetus at which the state's interest in its protection becomes "compelling" should be left to the informed judgment of the legislature.

He went on to say:

Like Beetz and Wilson, I agree that the protection of foetal interests by Parliament is also a valid governmental objective. It follows that balancing these interests, with the lives and health of women a major factor, is clearly an important governmental objective.

In other words, what he was saying is that the state has a responsibility to act on behalf of society's interest in the foetus. Many individuals such as myself waited to see such legislation that would enshrine the rights of the foetus. In late October and early November in the days preceding the introduction of Bill C-43 on November 3, the government systematically leaked bits of information which suggested that somehow the legislation that would be forthcoming would be pro-life in its form, that the