

## Bill Rea ? Both sides have to listen

For reasons I don't completely understand, abortions have become an issue in the last week or so.

Alas, I suspect that means there's going to be a lot of angry people, with much shouting back and forth, and many individuals, on both sides of the debate demonstrating how seriously ignorant and ill-mannered they really are.

As I have stated in the past, I have encountered people who are pro-choice who will rudely shout down anyone who tries to express an opinion to the contrary. I have never personally encountered such obnoxious behaviour from pro-lifers. In a previous life, when I worked in the big city to the southeast, there would occasionally be people outside one of the local hospitals holding up signs condemning the fact that abortions were performed within those walls. There were a couple of times when I photographed these people. They were almost always polite and sedate; appreciative of any attention their cause was drawing. But I'm sure there are some people on that side of the issue who can ignorantly shout down their opponents, if the opportunity presents itself.

As I have learned over the years, ignoramuses are well represented at just about any point on any scale you can think of.

The real issue boils down to the question of whether unborn children should be kept alive versus whether women should have the right to do as they choose with their bodies. And there are a lot of other issues in between, like incest, rape, mother's health, etc.

There are very valid reasons for being pro-choice. It can be effectively argued that women who inadvertently become pregnant should have an avenue in which they can disengage. People who adhere to those beliefs are not evil, and they have every right to have their views put forth in open public debate. I would submit that anyone who fight to suppress them are themselves evil.

There are very valid reasons for being pro-life. It can be effectively argued that unborn children should not die because they are inconvenient. I am also always very mindful of the fact that the presence of every single person on this earth today, including myself and every person reading these words, is a direct result of a woman who did not terminate her pregnancy. People who adhere to those beliefs are not evil, and they have every right to have their views put forth in open public debate. I would submit that anyone who fight to suppress them are themselves evil.

The thing that upsets me with the fact this issue has come to some prominence again is a lot of it has been prompted by the people at Queen's Park, and I think both sides of the debate see it as a political tool heading into an election year. I doubt if the merits of either side of this issue are going to be factors.

The Liberal government introduced a bill last Wednesday. It would prohibit people from showing anti-abortion signs, handing out literature or trying to dissuade women from having an abortion within up to 150 metres of a facility at which such procedures could be performed.

I have read stories suggesting the bill was a ploy to get Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown to raise a fuss.

There is confusion as to where Brown stands when it comes to abortion, so the theories were he was going to stand up and fight this legislation. But, according to the accounts I have read, he pulled a bit of an end run on the government by calling for swift passage of the bill. That effort was rejected.

It does make one wonder whether the government is really interested in helping women seeking abortions, or rather more interested in making the opposition look bad.

I am of two minds when it comes to this legislation.

On the one hand, people are entitled to respect and privacy when it comes to medical procedures they undergo, be they flu shots or heart transplants, and that includes abortions. I had a medical issue about 10 years ago, requiring a very brief stay in the hospital. The procedure was successful, meaning you're all still stuck with me. But people in my circle (work colleagues, etc.) knew only that I was going in for day surgery. Only my wife and brother knew all the details, and that is how it remains to this day, and will continue.

On the other hand, we have to appreciate that the issue of abortions is a contentious one, and it has been previously established that those who oppose them are not evil people. True, there are many, many other people who disagree with them, but what's wrong with that?

We like to think we live in a free society, yet I am frequently appalled at how little some people are prepared to ensure that.

If we want to consider this a free society, then all of us have to be prepared to prove it, and that might as well start with respecting the other sides in issues.

There are those of us who feel passionately about some issue or another. We therefore believe we have the right to voice our opinions, be it verbally or in writing. Fair enough. Like I stated above, this is supposed to be a free society. But there's the other end of the bargain. It says that people who disagree with us must have exactly the same right to express their views, meaning they are entitled to the same amount of air time and (or) ink ? no more and no less.

The people who are prepared to tolerate and hear out the views of those they most vehemently disagree with are the ones most likely to solve the problems they face, and the issues that plague the rest of us.

How many people like that do we have?

