

Slippery Slopes And Elephants

by SHERALYN ROMAN

There are so many things to say about the recent US Supreme Court decision overturning Roe vs. Wade that I, and so many wonderful human beings I know, are struggling to find appropriate ways of addressing its impact. Adding to that struggle is when people who should know better, like a certain male member of the media, feel the need to warn us to stop ?clutching our pearls? because this is a US decision that won't impact us here in Canada. As the first Prime Minister Trudeau once opined about the US, ?Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, if I can call it that, one is affected by every twitch and grunt.? What we are now seeing in the US absolutely has the potential to turn into a long trip down a very slippery slope here in Canada and we would do well to remember that.

What we might also want to remember is history. History is our best teacher, if only we were better students of it. History has shown us time and again the dangers of not listening when fanatical, far-right extremists first appear on the collective radar. We dismiss their rhetoric with disdain. We attempt to attribute reason to their unreasonable demands and/or in our efforts to ensure equity we provide them with equal access to debate platforms when in fact they have zero desire to debate and seek only to push their specific agenda. What we have seen in the US over the last several years, we ARE in fact ALSO seeing here in Canada. Whether these are discussions and protests about mask mandates, to vaccinate or not to vaccinate, these issues, and others like them, are straddling the border between our two countries ? except for when that border has been blocked by these same protestors. To therefore state this is unequivocally only an ?American? issue is to pull one's blinders very firmly over one's eyes and refuse to see what history has already shown us CAN happen.

The very words ?pearl clutching? in and of themselves are derogatory, suggesting an overwrought, middle-aged woman gazing about feverishly and clutching at her pearls as she mutters and flutters around without any impact about ?the state of the world.? Overturning Roe vs. Wade isn't ?clutch? my necklace worthy, it's grab my computer to write to my government officials worthy. It's grab a protest sign in sympathy worthy, donate money to organizations supporting women to travel to safe states for an abortion worthy. It's about Canadians letting every woman living in the US know that whatever we can do to support them in their fight to regain not only justice but liberty over their own person, is what we will do. It's about perhaps reading Margaret Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* not as works of fiction but as a warning and a resistance manifesto. Because if we don't, and we acquiesce quietly because it's ?not us? ? we surrender to whenever this issue becomes a popular talking point here too.

The US has essentially demoted women to second-class citizens, ones who cannot be trusted to have agency over their own bodies. They are denying women the fundamental freedom to make their own decisions, manage their own health care or plan for their own future. They are forcing women to give birth children they cannot support, children conceived by rape or as a result of incest, in some cases even forcing birth upon females who are still children themselves and whose bodies are literally not equipped or mature enough to do so. The Supreme Court of the United States has decided, allegedly in a ?free? country, over 50% of the population is in fact not free. It has decided that women experiencing an ectopic pregnancy (the only diagnosis for which, if left untreated, is maternal death) will die. Yes, you read that right, and I for one, with a stomach spanning scar and a few missing body parts would not be here writing this column had I lived in any of the many US states now banning abortion for any reason whatsoever, including ectopic pregnancies or the pre-term death of a foetus. What of doctors who have taken an oath to do no harm? Hospitals who exist to save people? What ?choice? do doctors who actually want to save people have now?

If this all sounds a little too much like an authoritarian state it's because it is. Ask a woman living under Taliban rule in Afghanistan what is like to have ?leaders? make their every decision for them. Remember how the Taliban promised the world, as families desperately crowded around the airport in an attempt to flee, that women would still be able to go to school and to vote? Has anyone asked how that's going lately? Someone needs to remind Americans that religious fundamentalism that in any way interferes with the running of a country or denies certain citizens its rights is exactly that ? even when that label is evangelical or conservative Christian.

SCOTUS is on a slippery slope and we're at the bottom of the hill, potentially in harm's way. Not content with overturning Roe vs. Wade, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote in his concurring opinion that perhaps it's also time to look at the laws governing gay marriage, sodomy and contraception. In other words, not content with just controlling women, it appears the US is gunning (pun intended since unlike abortions guns are legal) for the LGBTQ2S+ community next. Think it can't happen? Ya, that's what we all thought when the issue of overturning a decades old, hard-fought for abortion law was first hinted at just a few months ago. Now look where we are. Let's hope the elephant doesn't twitch and grunt any more than it already has.

For now, Happy Canada Day.