

Editorial

State should not pay to make abortions available

Sen. Bernice Labeledz of Omaha is right in requesting that the state Department of Public Welfare be prohibited from using state money to make abortions available.

Labeledz, one of the state Legislature's most ardent abortion opponents, asked Gov. Charles Thone during the weekend to have the Welfare Department draft regulations that would ban it from using state dollars to "facilitate abortions," the United Press International reported.

Labeledz, a South Omaha resident, has previously introduced anti-abortion legislation in the Unicameral. Earlier this summer, she said that after the Welfare Department drafts the regulations she requested, she will determine what further legislative action to take.

The request for the funding regulations came after a July 24 incident at a South Omaha private abortion clinic.

A girl under state custody at the Nebraska Center for Children and Youth in Lincoln was driven in a state car and by two state employees to the clinic to have an abortion.

After Labeledz learned about the event, the Welfare Department said no state funds were used to pay for the girl's abortion and that no state law was violated in using a state car to transport the girl.

Soon afterward, the deputy director for the Welfare Department said state law requires that state wards receive the proper medical attention. In the July 24 incident, the girl's doctor recommended an abortion be completed.

In a report on the incident, requested by Labeledz, the Welfare Department said it had not paid for any abortion for wards during the last two years.

The report said 10 girls under state care had had abortions during those years and only in the July 24 case was a state car used. Additionally, the report said that although no wards had their abortions paid for, last year state and federal funds were used for four abortions for women receiving welfare.

The report verified that wards are not getting state-financed abortions — a major concern of Labeledz. That is as it should be. The report also verified that in at least one case, state resources — namely a state car and two state employees — were used to help a ward obtain an abortion. That is not as it should be.

The governor should fulfill Labeledz's request that the Welfare Department draft and adopt funding prohibitions in abortion cases. The state doesn't pay for wards' abortions; it should be consistent and not pay for making those abortions available either.

Morally desirable doesn't mean 'law'

On Feb. 6, a 12-year-old rape victim in Michigan gave birth after being refused an abortion. Her mother, it seems, was against the abortion (the rapist was the woman's "boyfriend") and so the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Court judge legally prevented it. Since then, the court has decided that because of her age the girl is unfit to care for the infant, and has placed the baby in a foster home.

In Pennsylvania last month, a 23-year-old woman who had been in a coma since June won a court order that



Julia O'Gara

allowed her to have an abortion. Her mother, fearing the pregnancy might endanger her daughter's chances for recovery, filed suit in Chester County to allow doctors to terminate the pregnancy even though the daughter was not able to give "informed consent."

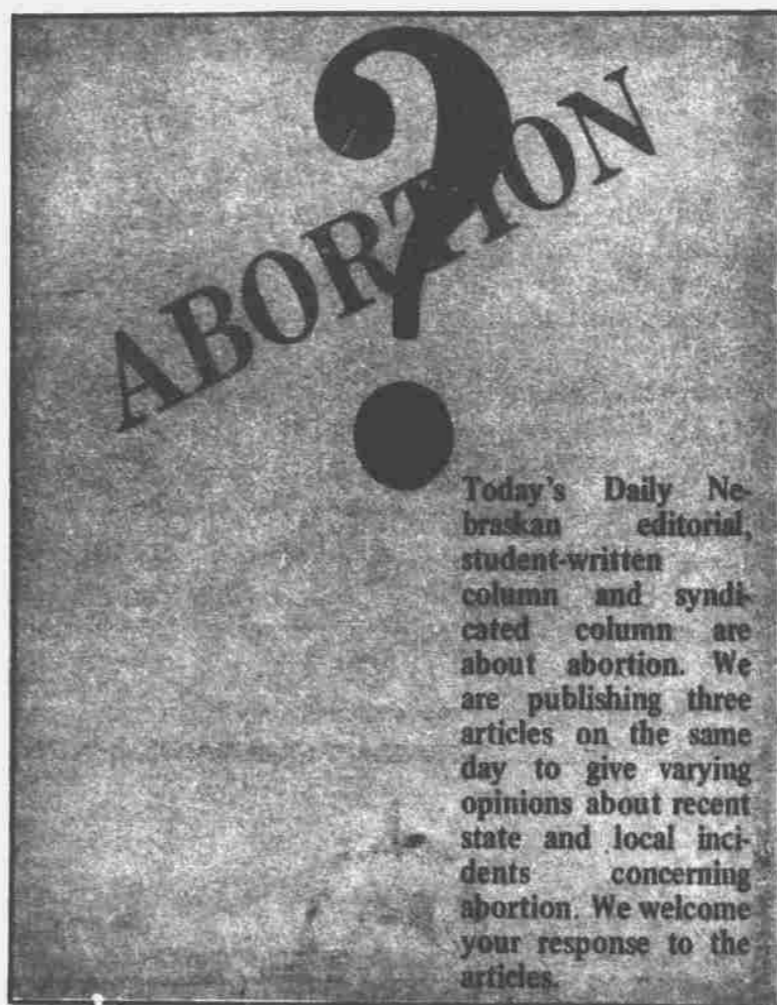
In Nebraska recently, an incident involving a state ward caught the attention of Omaha Sen. Bernice Labeledz. The youth involved was driven to an Omaha abortion clinic in a state-owned car. Labeledz is opposed to using state funds to pay for abortions and reimbursing state employees who use their own vehicles for transportation to abortion clinics.

"As long as there is one abortion performed in the state of Nebraska and tax dollars are used, I will continue to investigate," she said.

Ethical and legal arguments concerning abortion are nothing new. Since the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court rulings in the cases of Doe vs. Bolton and Roe vs. Wade, politicians, religious leaders and philosophers have struggled to define what is both morally judicious and legally desirable regarding abortion.

In the Senate these past two weeks, the debate was on again. Sen. Jesse Helms, R-North Carolina, and Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, sponsored separate pieces of legislation that would enable the federal government or the states to prohibit or severely limit abortions. The rationale for Helms' argument was that the Supreme Court was wrong in its 1973 ruling that allowed abortions and should therefore overturn that ruling. Although the two proposals were defeated, they are sure to come up again during next year's congressional session.

Abortion is an extremely complex and volatile topic,



and any attempts to simplify the argument and deal with it objectively are almost always met with defeat. The battle lines have been clearly drawn and people hasten to queue up on the side of their favorite ideology: pro-life over here, pro-choice over there.

But it is not enough to merely state that abortion is fundamentally right or wrong "just because I think so." Too many variables are involved. Before coming to any conclusions about how one stands on the abortion issue, it would be advisable to consider the difference between moral and legal responsibilities. Just because something can be defined as a morally desirable act does not necessarily mean that it should be translated into law.

There are many troubling questions about abortion. Should it be used only when the life of the mother is at stake? What about cases of confirmed congenital deformities or mental retardation? Rape and incest? Or failure of birth control?

And if abortion is prohibited because of someone else's belief in the "sanctity of life," then who should take responsibility for that resulting life — the mother or those who force her by law to continue the pregnancy? Unfortunately, anti-choice proponents offer no consistent or reasonable answers to these questions.

Who what extent, then, are we our brother's and our sister's keepers? As a moral question, it is best left to the individual, not the courts, to decide.

Partners one day, opponents the next

Two scenes out of recent newsreels are stuck in my mind: images of friendship and competition, winning and losing and caring.

The first scene was a page one photo of Pam Shriver walking off the court at Forest Hills, arm in arm with Martina Navratilova — the victor comforting the van-



Ellen Goodman

quished. The two friends who had just battled each other would soon again be doubles partners.

The next scene was relayed to me secondhand. It took place in the Senate chamber where Bob Packwood was standing alone, filibustering against the Helms anti-abortion amendment. As he read from James Mohr's history of abortion, Jesse Helms entered. The senator from North Carolina put his arm around the senator from Oregon and together they walked around the floor as Packwood continued to read. Even in conflict, they rubbed shoulders.

If I were a photo editor, I would have written the same caption under these snapshots: No Hard Feelings. They were pictures of two people, on opposite sides of the net, on opposite sides of a political battle, reassuring each other that they could still get along, walk along.

They were, in that sense, portraits of professionals. It's pros, after all, who learn how to fight wholeheartedly without feeling angry at the opposition. Without taking it personally.

This is a tough business for the bulk of us "amateurs." Few can manage it without training. Certainly not as kids. In my own childhood, when I disagreed with my father, he thought we were debating and I thought we were arguing. Only I took it personally.

Even today, I think it's hard for a lot of us to see competition — for points or points of view — without assuming personal conflict.

Continued on Page 5



Letters

Episcopalians differ on prayer book changes

The sweeping generalities which characterize the syndicated column by Ross Mackenzie in the Sept. 16 Daily Nebraskan would be scarcely worth notice except that Mackenzie implies that he is an insider who knows what is going on in the Episcopal Church nationwide.

If he were to circulate among the deputies and exhibitors, instead of spending all his time with members of the Society for the Preservation of the 1928 Prayer Book, Mackenzie might find more enthusiasm for the church and the Lord out there among the rank and file than he imagines. The people I see and I talk with are, by and large, pleased with the new prayer book and the proposed hymnal

than are Mackenzie and associates, and by no means feel that Episcopal worship has been revised into "mundane irrelevance."

More importantly, many feel that the church has much more important matters on its agenda than preserving the exclusive use of Elizabethan English, as beautiful as that may be.

Incidentally, the Gallup poll to which Mackenzie refers (citing a "33 percent drop in allegiance since the mid-1970s"), has been largely discredited by official church statistics showing no such loss in actual membership.

The Rev. Don Hanway, chaplain, St. Mark's on the Campus Episcopal Church.