

# Opinion

## Change cause, not abortion law

Because you published editorial columns (Jan. 21 and 22) against legal abortion, I feel it is necessary to respond. Although the issue has been debated time and time again, I think I can provide a different perspective. Pro-choice people are the silent majority, and I hope what follows represents their views.

### Guest Opinion

I will approach this issue with a historical and evolutionary perspective, but also will consider the function of abortion in modern society. In the past abortion has been practiced in almost every society of the world and is a practice of great antiquity probably dating back to early Homo sapiens. Before the advent of modern abortion techniques and adequate contraception, women who wanted to control the size and structure of their families faced limited options. First was abstinence. They also could use abortive concoctions that rarely worked, such as a mix of gunpowder and vodka or herbal teas. Physical manipulation of the uterus such as pounding the belly, jumping out of trees or carrying excessive loads also were means of abortion. Both methods often resulted in the death of the mother. The final choice was to carry the baby to term and kill it at birth — infanticide. Lest you should think of such practices as capable of only those with a primitive mind, our ancestors were not beyond such practices. In western Europe until the 19th century, intentional infanticide came in the form of abandonment and "accidental" smothering when infants slept with their mothers.

Why was this practice so prevalent? Modern researchers suggest that parents were insuring their own survival and the survival of existing children by eliminating children born while another was still nursing or before another child could walk if the group was mobile (children are usually carried by the mother until age 4 in mobile groups). The object of survival in primitive society is to have enough children to outlive you and care for you when you are old. To invest in too many children too early or too soon may mean that none survive. This is evidenced by the high fertility and infant mortality rate in many Third World countries today.

The argument is actually much more complex than what I have presented here, but space does not permit more. How does this relate to the issue of abortion in the United States today? Why is abortion so prevalent in the United States? Abortion occurs because unwanted pregnancies occur. Unwanted pregnancies occur because our social structure does not provide the education or support necessary to prevent unwanted births. If we want to stop abortion, we must stop unwanted births.

The real issue should be "what is the best way to stop unwanted births?" The answer obviously is not to make abortion illegal. As discussed earlier, the lack of clinical abortion did not prevent aboriginal societies from practicing abortion. What *did* limit abortion in primitive societies: contraceptive practices.

In primitive society, the most effective forms of contraception were long, intensive breastfeeding (usually up to four years) which suppressed ovulation and post-partum sex taboos that did not permit sexual intercourse for a period of six months to two years after

birth. When these practices failed, abortion and/or infanticide were used. Unfortunately, in today's society, even discussing contraception has become a taboo.

Because we don't want to acknowledge that sexual activity occurs outside of marriage and among teenagers, we think it won't happen if we ignore it. And if we discuss contraception, we acknowledge women's sexual freedom.

I could discuss other issues related to abortion, but I will leave this for others. The point that I would like to make is that while abortions are rampant in U.S. society, the way to reduce abortion is not by making it illegal.

It also seems doubtful that we will be able to revert to a time when women were willing to accept their fate as only mothers and housewives and the double standards that suppressed the sexual freedom of women. These are the 1980s, and the 1990s are just around the corner.

Women's rights are here to stay, as are the right to abortion and the right to limit births through safe, adequate contraception. I suggest that the people who want to stop abortion spend their time more fruitfully by becoming involved in contraceptive education, fighting for better forms of contraception, male contraceptives or, better yet, start discussing contraception with their own children.

Let us address the cause, which is our own inability to deal with changes in our social behavior, and leave the law as stands. We may find down the road that abortion is no longer an issue.

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## Letters

### Student needs to learn toleration

This is a response to Richard DeLorme's letter (DN, Jan. 23) in which he criticized a Chris Welsch column (DN, Jan. 20) about Sen. Jesse Helms. My first reaction was to emphathize with DeLorme for his self-professed "fear of understanding my prognosis." I quickly realized, though, that he is in no danger of understanding some things, including the use of the English language.

Contrary to DeLorme's beliefs, it is not terrifying that "any dimwit would have the gall to write (that Helms is an "embarrassment") against a senior member of the United States Senate and Republican Party." What *is* terrifying is that Jesse Helms is a senior member of the U.S. Senate and the Republican Party.

The point is, of course, that nothing is more American than the freedom to criticize those in power.

As for DeLorme's "leftist-Marxist-Leninist-communist factions oozing into every known institution in this country . . ." well, say, how long has the College of Engineering and Technology been an institution at UNL?

Perhaps Welsch would be in a jail right now for expressing his political views if "Madman" Joseph McCarthy had been given only a little more time.

My advice to DeLorme: You spelled t-o-l-e-r-a-t-e correctly. The noun is toleration. Now go back to the dictionary and learn what it means.

David Bagby  
graduate  
German

### Being held accountable

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they do. You can actually get mad at them.

Of course, the city could not function if this rule substituted for The Washington Rule. The very poor, for instance, might storm Michel's house, demanding to know why he has supported the Reagan administration's program to make their life even harder. And God knows what would happen if, say, members of the Hispanic community approached administration officials on the street and asked them to justify the killing of Nicaraguans within Nicaragua. What if local abortion clinics barred the wives or daughters of congressmen who vociferously oppose abortion (want names?), and what would cocktail parties be like if journalists were held accountable by politicians for what they wrote?

In the end, Michel probably will get what Michel wants. Washington is not yet Berkeley. But once Michel's indignation subsides, he will understand that he has been paid a compliment. This, anyway, is what I concluded moments after that women at the reception took out after me. In a town where nothing seems to matter, she was proclaiming that she and her husband did — and so did my writing.

It is the same with Michel and his garage, and it's why he cannot lose. Either he'll get it because of who he is or he won't get it because of what he's done. If he has to park on the street and walk home in the rain, he can think of himself as a latter-day Descartes, the French philosopher. He said, "I think, therefore I am." Michel can say, "I'm wet, therefore I matter."

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Cohen written an editorial column for the Washington Post.

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