



Salt and Light

The Death of “Pro-Choice”

by Richard Doerflinger

Ever since Congress first approved the Hyde amendment in 1976, a nation divided on abortion has generally been able to agree on at least one thing: The government should not force Americans to fund or promote abortion against their will. Such coercion would violate both “life” and “choice,” the paramount values on both sides of this dispute. So for 37 years, Congress has approved (and, in many cases, annually reaffirmed) numerous provisions to prevent federal funding of abortion and abortion coverage in all but the rarest circumstances.

At a 2013 subcommittee hearing in Congress, a bill to establish this policy more firmly and consistently in federal law drew hostile reactions that suggest this truce is over.

The legislation is the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act (HR 7, S. 946). It would apply the policy of the Hyde amendment across all government programs, including the new Affordable Care Act (ACA), whose implementation has produced serious evasions and violations of that policy.

The Hyde policy has long enjoyed broad support among Americans, including American women. In one poll taken during Congress’s consideration of the ACA, most respondents opposed measures to make Americans pay for abortion coverage with their taxes or health premiums, and over two-thirds opposed abortion in their own health coverage—and on each question, women were more opposed than men. So one might think a law reflecting that consensus should sail through Congress.

Instead, HR 7 was the subject of loud protests and gross misrepresentations. Supporters of tax-funded abortion in the District of Columbia held a press conference to condemn the hearing, and protested outside the hearing room when the bill was approved—because it simply continues the current ban on publicly funded abortions in DC. Protesters shouted, “Where are the women?” to

protest the subcommittee’s all-male membership—although one of two pro-life witnesses, Helen Alvare, is a female law professor, and all subcommittee members opposing the bill were male. A witness against HR 7, Susan Wood of George Washington University, called it a “mean-spirited” attempt to “interfere” and “meddle” in women’s lives. She and other opponents were simply not interested in the difference between prohibiting something and declining to pay for it.

An abortion movement that once trumpeted privacy—the “right to be let alone” to make one’s own choices—now wants to inject abortion into all our lives as a public good demanding our support. But it is the height of hypocrisy to cry “Let me alone!” as you pick your neighbor’s pocket.

Abraham Lincoln faced a similar problem, as he tried without success to avoid civil war by compromising with those supporting slavery. The slave states rejected his offer to prevent slavery’s expansion, while leaving it alone where it was legal. He asked: What would satisfy his opponents? “This, and this only: cease to call slavery wrong, and join them in calling it right. And this must be done thoroughly—done in acts as well as in words. Silence will not be tolerated—we must place ourselves avowedly with them. . . . Holding, as they do, that slavery is morally right, and socially elevating, they cannot cease to demand a full national recognition of it, as a legal right, and a social blessing.”

Substitute “abortion” for “slavery” and you have a sketch of today’s “abortion rights” agenda. Countering that agenda won’t take a civil war—just pro-life citizens who inform themselves on the issue, and make their voices heard in Congress.

Mr. Doerflinger was an associate director of the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. To learn how to write to Congress on this issue visit www.nchla.org; more on the bishops’ pro-life activities can be found at www.usccb.org/prolife.