

October 21, 2015

Testimony in Opposition to SB 214, Defunding of Planned Parenthood Bill

Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

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Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

Thank you Chairperson Coley, Ranking Minority Member Yuko, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee. I am Dr. Rabbi Howard Apothaker, Senior Rabbi of Temple Beth Shalom in New Albany. I was ordained as a Rabbi in 1980 and have served the same congregation in Greater Columbus, OH since then.

While living in Israel, my wife was raped, became pregnant as a result, and got an abortion.

In the State of Israel, there with a population of 8 million compared to 11 ½ million in the State of Ohio, there are more than 100 government facilities where a fully array of women's reproductive care is available, including 36 that include pregnancy-ending services. These 36 facilities, including the world famous Hadassah Hospital, all operate with government funding under government supervision and that government supervision includes today orthodox rabbis who follow the will of other rabbis who are members of today's Israeli Knesset. The Israeli army provides free reproductive care and pregnancy-ending services to its soldiers.

My wife, who eventually graduated from OSU, was a terrified teenage foreign student who needed help. She had no money and nowhere to turn. Israel was a place where, even then, counsel could be sought and services for ending pregnancy were possible.

Men with long beards and impeccable religious resumes including former Chief Rabbis of Israel, for example, Rabbi Ben-Zion Uziel and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, have, in their official capacities, permitted other orthodox Jews to obtain safe and legal abortions. These religious experts – not in any way dismissible as “lefties” – are not your normal local pastors. One, Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, before his death in 2006, the world's most prolific and well-respected rabbi on the issues of medical ethics, a rabbi and judge on Jerusalem's Supreme Rabbinical Court and the rabbi of Jerusalem's leading hospital, the Shaare Zedek Medical Center - provided lenient rulings even through the conclusion of the seventh month of pregnancy.

Almost every one here admires what a miracle the State of Israel is. Almost every one of us admires its scientific advances, its many Nobel prize winners, its own struggle and successes to remain religiously and ethnically Jewish while having to the engage the modern world, on the one hand, and the medieval worlds of its enemies on the other. Like everything that comes out of Israel, we ought to watch what successful people do and ignore, and even fight against what those of a medieval mentality do.

When I was a kid in the 1960s, I read a novel entitled “*1984*,” a work in which a superstate, controlled by a privileged elite, persecutes individualism and independent thinking as “thought crimes.” It rewrites newspaper articles, so that the historical record always supports the party line, distorting the truth with forgeries and falsifications.

The wiser among us still see Big Brother imposing itself on freedom. Indeed, in November 2011, fellow Jew, Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court, Stephen Breyer questioned government intrusion into individual freedoms in a democratic society by referencing “*1984*.”

For over two thousand years, Judaism has understood (1) personhood begins at birth and not conception and (2) that the life of a mother supersedes that of a fetus which threatens that mother, according to some, even psychologically. Read Ex. 21:22. That same Bible you read and cite shows that God punishes with death one who "spilled his semen on the ground," that is, to one who ejaculates not for the purpose of procreation (Gen., Ch. 38). If those here allow the shadow of 1984 to win out, most of us would be in jail or and, if the divine found out, worse. Fully 93% of all American Jews support legalized abortion in some fashion. 77% of Jewish Republicans favor legalized abortion in all or most cases.

Finally, and perhaps even more important, that same Scripture says that we have to look out for those who are disadvantaged. Lev. 19:15 states: "Do not show deference to the rich; treat your kinsman fairly." That American and religious principle is summarized three verses later with the reminder, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Do you measure up?

Planned Parenthood allows us to be moral and scriptural, allows to those who cannot afford them the same women's health care services as are available to those who can otherwise afford them. Do those who support SB 214 measure up to treating "your kinsman fairly?" My wife, who needed Israeli equivalent of Planned Parenthood at the time many years ago of her rape and impregnation, asks, "Would you have treated her fairly?" The orthodox religious establishment in Israel would say, "No."

Want to affirm Scripture? Want to affirm Big-Brotherless freedom? Want to provide what most orthodox rabbis in Israel permit by law to the women in Israel? Want to oppose the kind of medievalism fought by the Israelis whom we admire? Oppose Senate Bill 214.