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## Rights

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bility for fathering their children. Women, such activists say, carry most of the burdens of pregnancy and may have to carry most or all of the responsibility of rearing a child. To compel a woman to carry a child against her will unduly burdens her, they argue.

"The greatest right a woman has is to have a life and to have, absolutely, control over managing her fertility," said Byllye Avery of the National Black Women's Health Project at a pro-choice rally in Washington, D.C., April 22. Avery was quoted in a report compiled by the National Organization for Women, one of the rally sponsors.

Pro-life activists, however, will argue that Avery's statement ignores a simple fact — abortion violates the rights of other females, namely unborn girls. This position is held by such groups as Feminists for Life of America as well as Feminists for Life of New York of which Carol Crossed is a board member.

A nationally known advocate for the consistent ethic of life, which opposes abortion, war, poverty, euthanasia and the death penalty, Crossed is a parishioner at Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, Brighton.

Crossed said that being pregnant does make a woman more vulnerable to outside pressures. However, Crossed maintained that there's a disproportionate emphasis on women's rights in today's world over the rights of the unborn.

"The rights of a child are eradicated and completely destroyed," she said of the aborted. "A woman's rights are limited, but not eradicated."

### Victims' value

The battle over fetal rights and women's rights took place on a new field in late April as the U.S. House was slated to vote on the Unborn Victims of Violence Act (H.R. 503). The proposed law would recognize unborn children as equal victims of crimes committed against their mothers. The law specifically mentions that it is not intended to cover abortions voluntarily chosen by mothers. A close vote was expected.

Pro-choice U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren of California was expected to offer an amendment that would stiffen penalties against those who commit crimes against pregnant women, but the amendment would

not recognize the fetus as a person. However, pro-life activists have ridiculed the so-called "one victim substitute" legislation.

One such comment was made by Maureen Kramlich, public policy analyst for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities. In a statement posted on the Web, she said Lofgren's amendment ignores the fact that some women are targeted precisely for violence because they are pregnant. And being pregnant can mean only one thing, she noted.

"What is it about a 'pregnancy' that merits an added criminal penalty?" Kramlich wrote. "Clearly, it is the unique and precious life of a child whom some mothers risk their lives to save."

Supporters of legalized abortion see the Unborn Victims bill as nothing more than an backdoor attempt to undermine *Roe vs. Wade*. Proponents of the bill have made comments all over the map claiming that the bill is nothing of the sort. But then they acknowledge that it is a step in the pro-life direction.

Interestingly, however, although H.R. 503 appears to be pro-life, in some ways, it embodies a pro-choice concept, according to Christina Fadden Fitch, a member of the board of directors of Feminists for Life of New York, and a Liverpool, N.Y., resident. The bill acknowledges that there's a difference between a child a mother wants and a child a mother doesn't want.

"(H.R. 503) begs the question 'Why is this unborn child considered a loss, but in another case, it's not considered a loss but a right, a liberation,'" she said in a phone interview from her home office.

On that note, Jann Armantrout, life issues coordinator for the Diocese of Rochester, stated that opponents of H.R. 503 contradict their own rhetoric about choice. If a woman may choose to see her unborn child as someone who may be aborted, a woman should also be able to see her unborn child as someone to be mourned when lost, she noted.



"I honestly think, as a woman, if my baby is destroyed through violence, I don't want any group telling me it's not a baby," she said.

### Clash of rights

A desire to enshrine abortion rights have too often trumped the securing of other rights in the world, according to Crossed and Armantrout. Both espoused the pro-life position in a panel discussion at the University of Rochester March 29.

Sponsored by the campus chapter of Amnesty International, an international human rights organization, the discussion was attended by almost 70 students. The panel, which also included pro-choice advocates, discussed the question: "Does Abortion Legisla-

tion Infringe Upon Human Rights?"

Representing the pro-choice side were Dr. Rachael Phelps, a fellow in family planning and reproductive health at Highland Hospital; and Dr. Steve Felding, a sociologist with the university's department of family medicine.

The four panelists each gave a brief presentation, and then answered questions from the audience. Among the topics discussed was President Bush's executive order in January stipulating that funds be withheld from international family planning groups that inform women about abortion, and groups that advocate for legalized abortion in their countries.

Armantrout noted that a women's health bill in the New York State Legislature stalled March 21 because a compromise could not be forged over the issues of artificial contraception and fertility treatments. The Assembly's version of the bill would have mandated that employers include contraception and fertility procedures in their employee health plans. The Senate version would have allowed employers like the Catholic Church to opt out of offering employees coverage that contradicted their religious beliefs.

Armantrout argued that pro-choice advocates' refusal to compromise on the issue of contraception and fertility treatment

coverage may have killed a bill that would have improved benefits covering other areas of women's health, like post-menopausal conditions.

"This is an example of reproductive rights, if you will, impacting on human rights," she said.

Crossed cited several international declarations and agreements that made no distinction between unborn and born children, and argued that it was clear international law extended protection to the unborn. However, she said, countries like the United States had repeatedly violated the spirit of such agreements by tying population control measures to its foreign aid programs.

Phelps, who has treated women in Bangladesh suffering the ill effects of botched abortions, argued that outlawing abortion abroad or here means some women will inevitably die or suffer from seeking dangerous abortions. She added that in countries like Bangladesh, society still punishes women severely for bearing children out of wedlock, and so they seek illegal, dangerous abortions. She also criticized the Catholic Church for opposing artificial birth control.

"No one wants abortions," she said. "I would like to see that there would never be another abortion in the world. But I want to see women live."

Armantrout expressed sympathy for "my sisters" in countries like Bangladesh, but maintained that abortion simply allows such oppression to continue unabated since it takes society off the hook for reforming itself. In a follow-up interview, Armantrout added that the Catholic Church has recognized that women in poor countries are often the victims of such exploitative practices as forced sexual slavery and poorly paid labor. Through its missions and development work, the church has labored to help such women, she said, a fact that many abortion advocates rarely recognize.

"International feminist organizations need to focus attention on women's rights beyond their uteruses," she said.

In a follow-up interview, Crossed added that women will always suffer oppression until their ability to bear children is fully respected by societies everywhere. Abortion simply delays the day when that will happen, she said.

"For women to be recognized as humans within wombs, then it seems to be that they need to be recognized as mothers," Crossed said. "If that right is neutralized, how does that advance women's rights?"

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