

# A Matter of Responsibility

By Pete Purcell

In 1973, the U. S. Supreme Court, ruling on the case Roe vs Wade, declared that a woman's right to decide to terminate a pregnancy is guaranteed by the right to privacy protected by the 9th and 14th Amendments. On Oct. 5, 1981, Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, began a hearing on his proposed amendment to the Constitution allowing Congress and/or state legislatures to "restrict or prohibit abortions." Senator Hatch declared at the hearing, "I believe that abortion, under virtually all circumstances, is wrong because it involves the taking of a human life. This is my own moral, ethical, and—dare I say it—religious perspective."

Hatch's proposed amendment is part of a new "Two Amendment" strategy, proposed by David O'Steen, an official of the National Right-to-Life Committee, to ranking anti-abortion officials, advising them to drop their old strategy of attempting to pass a single amendment granting fetuses personhood at conception, according to The Humanist magazine. The new strategy consists of three steps: **Step One:** "Passage and ratification of a Constitutional amendment that would authorize the U. S. Congress to protect all human life including the unborn. This amendment should probably also authorize concurrent state legislation."

**Step Two:** "Passage of federal legislation... establishing protection for the unborn consistent with that desired in the ultimate amendment. Similar legislation should be passed in the states... at the same time, federal legislation should be passed protecting the unborn from abortifacients and preventing the deployment of the new postimplantation abortifacients that are now being developed."

**Step Three:** "A second constitutional amendment establishing personhood for the unborn... this final amendment could be agreed upon National Right-to-Life Committee's wording."

The old single amendment strategy, favored by evango/politico figures such as Falwell and Graham, as well as by far-righters Helms and Reagan,

and this new back-door strategy basically strive for the same goal—prohibition of abortion based on the grounds that human life begins at conception. Besides the obviously questionable practice of mixing politics and religion—Hatch's "religious perspective"—the anti-abortion strategies are weak in that their main argument—that personhood begins at conception, is simply not realistically substantial.

At the instant of conception, a human egg consists of one cell. Although an admittedly miraculous creation, the cell is simply that—a cell. Chemically it differs little from the single-celled egg of a frog, or monkey, or any other mammal's fertilized egg. By no stretch of the imagination could it be called a living, thinking human being. Where it does differ from the animals is in the contents of chromosomes. Inside these wonderful little proteins are genes that contain the codes for assimilating thousands of chemical compounds, in exactly the correct order and position, into a human being—an incredible chemical and architectural accomplishment that we haven't even begun to understand.

But a fertilized egg doesn't have a monopoly on chromosomes—they are found in every cell in the human body. Theoretically it is possible to clone a human being from almost any single cell in the body—they all contain the genetic "blueprint" for a complete body. A human egg is simply a cellular "specialist" at this business of reproduction. It is equipped to combine its genetic "blueprint" with that of a sperm cell to produce a fertilized egg with characteristics of both parents—a very effective means of insuring variety in our species. Just as an abdominal mesentary cell could serve as a skin cell, but could not do the job nearly as efficiently, so an egg cannot be looked upon with awe because it can produce a human being. Any human cell could, but the egg, being a "specialist" at reproduction, can do it best.

If the fetus, then, does not become a "person" at conception, when does it? In the first trimester? Second? Third? Or at birth? Perhaps we are being arrogant, even obnoxious, in trying to settle this question

before we have finished gathering the evidence. Perhaps we shall never know. What we do know is that a decision must be made. Hiding behind Constitutional Amendments will not make the responsibility go away. In an idealistic, fairy tale world proclamations and amendments might solve the problem, but until we can build that world we must face the fact that thousands of unwanted conceptions are going to occur every year and that no law that would make them children can make them wanted.

The choice of completion or termination of the pregnancy must be left in the hands of the parents, for only they can even begin to have an idea of what the child's life will be like—and remember, we are speaking of the real world, where every child isn't assured a happy home environment and loving parents to care for him. We are speaking of children who are neglected, abused and abandoned because no one wanted them. Forcing a woman to complete her pregnancy against her will would certainly serve as punishment for her "mistake"—but look at the "punishment," the "mistake"—a human being. A child simply cannot be used to "teach the mother a lesson." The "reminder" is too valuable an object.

The goal of our democratic society has always been to provide an environment not just for life, but for a quality of life—an opportunity for the "pursuit of happiness." Can we attempt to offer our children anything less? By withholding choice from a necessarily responsible adult on the grounds of offering it to an unknowing fetus, by enforcing completion of pregnancy as a punishment for accidental fertilization, we will be forcing upon thousands of unwanted children a life devoid of quality, a hell that could have been prevented.

It would be so easy to hide behind a law, an amendment, a proclamation prohibiting abortion, placing the responsibility in the hands of the government instead of the individual. But to attempt to rid ourselves of this responsibility is something we simply cannot do; the consequences are too great, the stakes, too high.

# Urban Decay Hits Wilson

Wide Awake Wilson is suffering from a terminal disease. This cancerous disease is not uncommon to urban America. It strikes the famous—New York, Boston, Chicago—and the infamous—Rocky Mount, Kinston and Wilson. It is not poverty or crime, even though both of those are important. The disease is urban decay.

Urban decay in its many forms has a few characteristics that are noticeable to almost anyone. It starts in the downtown area of a city. The oldest, it seems, are always the first to go. Tell-tale signs are vacant store fronts. And if you can walk along a sidewalk and feel all alone in the business district, you can be certain you are watching urban decay at work.

Wilson, unfortunately, is not immune to urban decay. A prime example of urban decay, Wilsonian style, is on Tarboro Street between Barnes and Nash Streets. In an area that could have a tremendous amount of appeal, 20 percent of the 30 store fronts are vacant.

Why would anyone pass up an opportunity to locate in such a prime area? The reasons are almost too numerous to list. Among them are no parking, an enormous amount of renovation needed to put the stores in operation, unless all you want is a hole in the wall, and last but not least, no customers.

Wilson, like many cities, has tried to fight what some believe is inevitable. The city has hired Greg Walker as the Executive Director of the Wilson Downtown Redevelopment Corporation.

Downtown redevelopment

has three schools of thought. One is that redevelopment is useless and should not be conducted. A second idea is that businesses are going to leave downtown areas and they should not be coaxed into staying. Instead, banks, insurance offices, and similar businesses that do well in downtown areas should be encouraged to locate in town and not in shopping malls. Still another idea on redevelopment holds that with some encouragement businesses that are already downtown will stay and others can be enticed into wanting to be downtown.

The school of thought that the Wilson Redevelopment folks have latched onto appears to be a hybrid of something—exactly what, is not clear. The Wilson Downtown Redevelopment Corporation, in conjunction with the downtown merchants, is trying to establish a reward to entice people to turn in vandals who hang around the bars and throw paper in the streets. In other towns criminals of that magnitude are the responsibility of the police. After all, it is unlikely that vandals scrape paint off of half a store front and leave the other half, or put cracks in brick or concrete walls.

Some stores are trying revitalization ideas. Churchwell's Jewelers is one of them. The city has also done some face-lifting. The courthouse, municipal building and police station are evidence of that. But even with a noble start, The Wilson Daily Times and Merrill Lynch Stock Brokerage, two businesses that function well in downtown areas, are leaving.

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