

# Abortion: A Choice That Affects All Women

by Lisa Phelps

*Editors' Note: The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of The Salemite.*

In 1973 the Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision which made abortion legal in the United States.

The decision on Roe vs. Wade left the time limit in which the abortion could be legally performed to the discretion of the individual states. This ruling allowed women, for the first time in over a century, complete reproductive freedom.

In recent years however, this right to privacy, which the Supreme Court declared was the constitutional right of all citizens, has come under attack by groups who declare that abortion is murder and should be made illegal. This issue has been put on moral terms, but the truth is that it is not about who is morally right or wrong.

The truth is that if abortion is made illegal, women will die. Plain and simple. Right now abortion is the safest medical procedure one can have (in a doctor's office). However, should abortions be declared illegal, they will move from the safety of a doctor's office to unsanitary, back-alley clinics.

On July 3, 1989 The United States Supreme Court handed down a decision on Webster vs Reproductive Health Services. This decision placed the legality of abortion back into that hands of individual states. Though this did not overturn Roe vs. Wade (1973), the court did severely undermine the right of women in the United States to a safe and legal abortion.

Abortion has become the most controversial issue in the United States. Today whether abortion remains legal and safe should be of great concern to all people, especially women.

Instead of arguing the morality of abortion, whether life begins at conception, or whether, as anti-abortionists allege, abortion is simply murder, perhaps it would be better to simply look at the facts.

Forty-six percent of all American women will have an abortion. And, the abortion rate in the US is lower than the world's average abortion rate.

While anti-abortionists are quick to allege that by the time most abortions are performed the fetus is a viable being, statistics prove that this allegation is not true. Ninety-one percent of all abortions are performed in the first trimester (12 weeks).

One of the major points of the anti-abortionist groups is that life begins at conception. If this were true and declared law by the court, contraceptives, such as the pill, which as the name suggests is against conception, would be made illegal.

If education about sex and reproduction were more readily available, the number of unwanted pregnancies would decrease. It seems that instead of declaring abortions illegal, the best way to stop abortion is through education.

Looking at this pragmatically, abortion will continue to occur. Whether it is legal or illegal, women will continue to have them. In fact, as the following chart shows, the act of making abortion illegal does not reduce the incidence of abortion. If we compare

The abortions in Brazil are not the safe abortions performed by physicians in the U.S. These are illegal abortions performed in unsanitary clinics by untrained people.

Some 200,000 women die from botched, illegal abortions each year in Third World countries. One woman dies every three minutes. In Latin America, illegal abortion is the number one killer of women between 15- 39 years of age.

Despite these statistics, we are allowing our government to push abortions out of the safety of legal clinics and straight into the back alleys. In the next year, two more cases concerning abortion will come before Supreme Court for review. The outcome of these two cases will decide whether or not the court overturns Roe vs Wade.

In the past week, President Bush vetoed a Congressional bill that would have allotted government funding for abortions resulting from rape and/or incest. The House of Representatives failed to override the President's veto. Obviously, the members of the House have not been receiving the message of concern from their constituents.

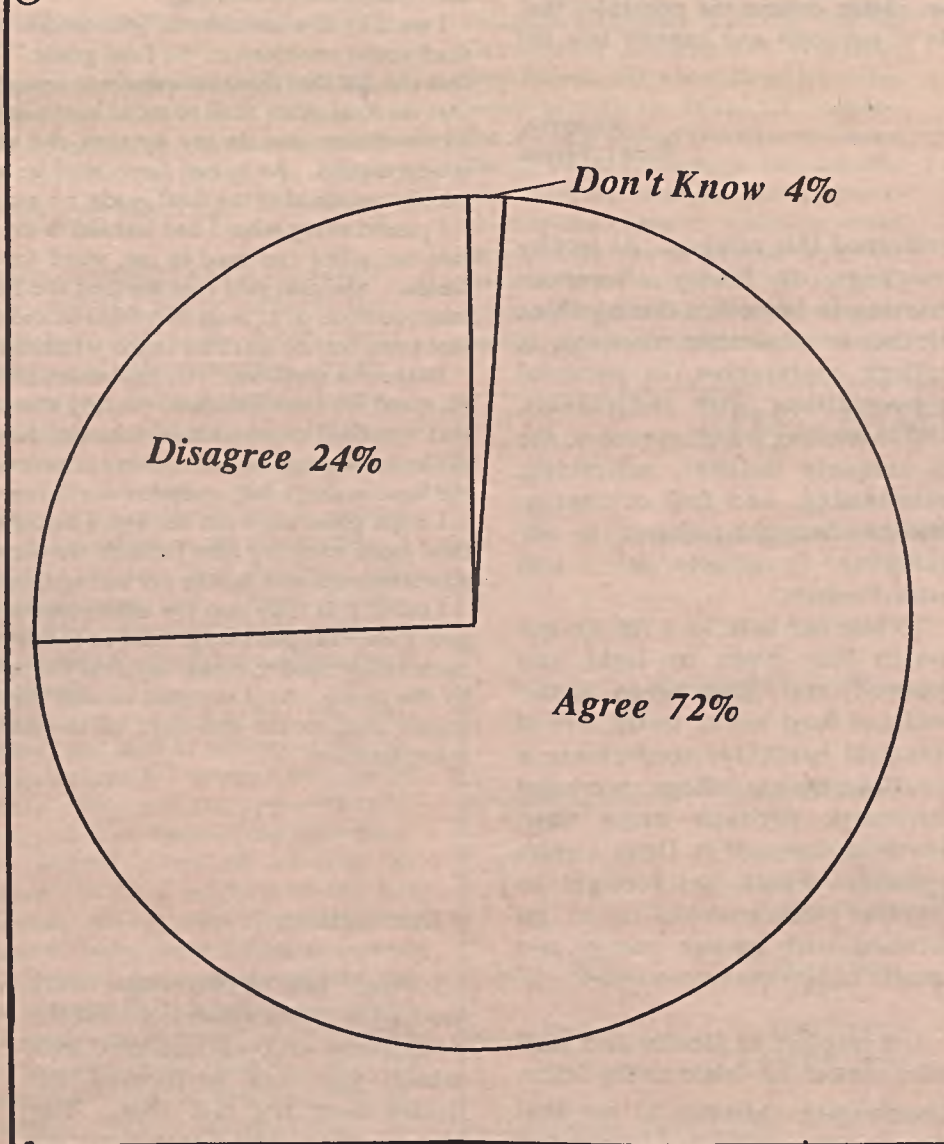
The people of the US are concerned about the issue. In a February 1989 poll, 72 percent of North Carolinians agreed that "Abortion is a private issue between a woman, her family, and her doctor. The government should not be involved."

If you are concerned about women's rights to reproductive freedom, there are quite a few things that you can do. Write to your legislators and let them know that if they do not support your right to choose you will not support them in the next election.

Get involved in organizations and activities that promote your right to choose. You can also join in the Reproductive Freedom Rally in Washington, D.C. on November 12, 1989. A group from Salem will be going to the rally, and we urge anyone interested to join the group. The cost will be \$10 for the bus seat. We will be meeting in Biting Lobby on Wednesday, November 1 at 7:00 to sign up and discuss the trip.

Also, the North Carolina Coalition for Choice is asking everyone who supports pro-choice to tie a green ribbon on their car.

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If the point of the anti-abortionists is to stop abortions, it would seem logical to increase access to inexpensive contraception. It follows that the fewer unwanted pregnancies that occur, the fewer abortions will occur.

the abortion rates in the United States, legal, to abortion rates in Brazil, where abortion is illegal, we see that Brazil, with one half the population of the United States, has two times the number of abortions.