opinion

feedback

Massachusetts should not cut back funding of abortions

To the Editor:

While I agree with Mark DeGuer's assertion that Referendum Question #1 will have no effect on the legality of abortions ("Abortion question is misconception.") Oct. 29), I do not think that the probability that abortion funding will be reduced should be taken lightly.

It is certainly true that no matter what the outcome of the referendum, abortions will remain legal everywhere in the United States. The Supreme Court's decision in Roe v. Wade made abortion legal in 1973. Abortion will only become illegal if the Supreme Court reverses its decision.

The decision gave women the right of choice. The unethical aspect of curtailing abortion funding is that it allows wealthy women freedom to choose while preventing indigent women from doing the same. Precisely that segment of the population which has the most to lose from unwanted pregnancies will be coerced into bearing children because the state will not fund abortion but will fund the alternative, childbirth.

By the time a woman discovers that she is pregnant, she has approximately two months left of the first three months in which abortions are the safest and the cheapest. In that short amount of time, she must not only make a very difficult decision about whether to carry her pregnancy to term, but she must also scrape together the funds to have an abortion, if that is her decision. As the pregnancy progresses, abortion not only becomes a more dangerous and costly option, but it is also likely to increase greatly any psychological stress to the woman.

A similar funding issue was decided on a federal level a few years ago. The Supreme Court upheld the Hyde Amendment, which denied federal funding of medical necessary abortions for indigent women.

The effect of this amendment was that in the subsequent year, 20 percent of those pregnancies medically requiring abortions occurred in childbirth. The other 80 percent found means to have abortions anyway, either by being lucky enough to live in states that still provided funding, by finding some other way to come up with the money, or by having illegal abortions.

The 20 percent who were successfully coerced into having children had to suffer not only the physical injury they sustained as a result of the childbirth but also the unwarranted financial and emotional responsibility of raising a child.

Nor can it be said that the taxpayers' money is wasted on abortion. There are two alternatives for a woman who is pregnant: she can either have the child or have an abortion. The state, by choosing not to fund the latter, incurs greater cost to itself by suddenly having to fund more of the former.

Abortion in this state only costs several hundred dollars. On the other hand, a normal childbirth free of complications will have the cost the state $3,000 by the time the baby is born. The state is then responsible for the welfare of the child until it is 18. In addition, 12 years of public schooling figure into the bill. The monies to the state of not funding abortion are enormous.

People are not free to allocate their tax money as they see fit. It will have to pay for military buildups and the Strategic Defense Initiative whether I like it or not. Similarly, it is the place of government, not private organizations, to look out for the well-being of its citizens.

Social programs affect large numbers of people and their costs are extremely high. Expecting private citizens to pick up the cost of abortion for every indigent woman in the state is as ridiculous as throwing quarters to beggars. Vote on Question #1.

Nicole Stucki '88

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