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Rising Above Roe v. Wade

Maybe politics isn't the place to start.

By WILLIAM MCGURN



Are babies better than abortions?

That's not a question we are accustomed to hearing. For the most part, abortion—America's most divisive issue—plays out as a question of competing rights. So it will be this weekend as pro-life and pro-choice legions each mark the 38th anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision on abortion.

Yet a simple figure released earlier this month by the Chiaroscuro Foundation, a private nonprofit organization, provokes a different question. After crunching the latest statistics from New York City's Health Department, the foundation reported that 41% of pregnancies (excluding miscarriage) in New York ended in abortion. That's double the national rate.

So again the question: As a society, does this figure say anything about the choice between a baby and abortion? Even for those who believe the choice for an abortion belongs to a woman alone and ought to be unfettered by city, state or federal law, is there any ratio such a person would say is too high?

The question becomes even more compelling when broken down by race. For Hispanics, the abortion rate was 41.3%—i.e., more than double the rate for whites. For African-Americans the numbers are still more grim: For every 1,000 African-American live births in New York, there were 1,489 abortions.

These numbers can make *Roe* seem very distant. Years ago, Bill Clinton famously summed up the pro-choice argument as "safe, legal, and rare." What can the qualifier "rare" mean, however, unless it means that in some fundamental sense, a baby is better than an abortion?



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Some, of course, will argue that what they mean is that America ought to devote more resources to helping women prevent getting pregnant in the first place. Whether or not that's as easily done as said, a focus on not getting pregnant does nothing for the woman who is pregnant and finds herself with a hard choice.

So how is New York responding? Earlier this month, the Chiaroscuro Foundation put together a high-profile press conference that brought the archbishop of New York and the leader of the one of Orthodox Jewry's

most distinguished organizations (Agudath Israel of America) together with the African-American pastor of a large, Harlem church and a Latina who serves as a spokeswoman for Democrats for Life. As the New York Sun pointed out, notwithstanding all this ecumenical focus on New York's distinction as America's abortion capital, it elicited nary a peep from the mayor.

Meanwhile, the speaker of the City Council, Christine Quinn, is pushing a bill designed to make it harder for people who are trying to help women keep their babies. Bill 371 targets Crisis Pregnancy Centers, and would require them, among other things, to advertise on site that they do not perform abortions or provide abortion referrals. It tells us something that there appears to be no interest in requiring that, say, Planned Parenthood post in their clinics some telling information of their own: 324,008 abortions nationwide against only 2,405 adoption referrals in 2008, the most recent year for which it reports statistics.

Rather than rehash the allegations against Crisis Pregnancy Centers—e.g., that they often disguise themselves as medical clinics, that they are not upfront about whether they offer abortion—let's stipulate for the sake of argument that they are all true. In the end, a woman who wants an abortion can still walk out and get one, as many do. A woman who doesn't necessarily want an abortion, however, can find all kinds of help: a place to live if her family or boyfriend has kicked her out; training for mother care; and, not least, the friendly face of a caring volunteer.

No doubt there are mothers who regret having their children. Occasionally you even read of one suing a doctor for not alerting her to a disability in her child that would have led her to abort if she had known. Far more common, however, are the websites with women repeating this heart-rending lament: "If only one person had encouraged me to keep my baby . . ."

On the moral claims and counterclaims on abortion, we have a vast chasm. Yet the moral divide can blind us to the possibilities that exist in all human communities. Might that start with recognizing that a 41% abortion rate means that many pregnant women are not getting the social help and encouragement they need to have their babies?

We all know people whose absolutism on a woman's legal right to choose does not prevent them from celebrating and supporting a pregnant woman within their midst who announces she is going to have a baby. So put aside *Roe* for a minute. And ask yourself this: What kind of America might we have if all pregnant women—especially black and Hispanic women who are disproportionately aborting—could feel from society that same welcome and encouragement?

Would it be too much to say "better"?

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