

EDITORIALS

OBSERVER

Freedom of Speech

"The Bill of Rights may have constituted a set of abstract legal guarantees, but those guarantees were not always enforceable. Frequently they yielded to power and in any case they failed to protect whole classes of people. But the Bill of Rights was more than a set of laws: it was also a beacon of hope to people who had little reason to hope, it was a set of ideals to which the vulnerable might aspire, something to strive for, even when the horizon seemed distant." Ira Glasser

Today we consider the Bill of Rights as "legally enforceable commands that courts are obliged to recognize and execute." Individuals and/or groups use the Bill of Rights as a tool to bring about their desires. Take for instance, the Ku Klux Klan. This group is a white supremacist group that was formed after the Civil War in the United States. Historically, they have been known for their acts of violence against blacks, Jews and other minorities. The Ku Klux Klan marched last weekend down lower Manhattan because they were exercising their constitutional right to march in the "White Pride" rally. According to New York law, it is unconstitutional for masked individuals to demonstrate in public. The First Amendment to our Constitution allows us the right of freedom of speech and assembly. That cannot be debated. The Ku Klux Klan is in their constitutional right to assemble and march. They are exercising their right to free and anonymous speech.

Some people believe our legal system ought to prohibit speech that expresses hatred or prejudice toward others based on race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or national origin. Regardless of public opinion opposing

the actions of the Ku Klux Klan, the provisions expressed in the First Amendment to the Constitution, protects their actions. What would happen to the provisions of the First Amendment if we allowed government the power to decide which expressions would be allowed and which to punish? We could all agree that minorities would suffer the most if such intervention were allowed. This is true because more often than not, the opponents of minorities are those in positions of power. A strong First Amendment does indeed provide for legal protections of hate groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, but it also provides for equal protection for everyone.

Most political expression may be useless or offensive, but the question

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that comes to mind is: Who decides? The First Amendment provides that individuals should decide and that it is never a good idea to give the government the power to label expression as a crime. History clearly proves that when government is given such a power it will use it in ways never intended, that it will find such expression a crime because it does not agree with it and finds a momentary majority defended by it. "The Beast of censorship, once unleashed, is impossible to control."

Cheryl Marie Moore
Editorial Editor

486: A Magic Bullet ?

Over twenty-five years has passed since the overturning of the US Supreme Court decision in the case of Roe v. Wade, in 1973. It was a victory for women's rights activists nationwide, and has (because of its overruling) prevented countless unwanted pregnancies for many women.

Now, a new era has begun in the United States with the recent FDA's approval of a long banned chemical abortion drug named RU-486 (also known as, mifepristone). This drug is the latest chemical innovation in fertility control, which is presently available in the US, for trials and test distribution.

RU-486 was developed in 1983 by a French Professor, Etienne Balleu, for the Roussel-Uclaf Pharmaceuticals, whose intentions in developing the drug were to help individuals in forming their families, and help humanity. The drug became available for wide spread usage in France in 1988, and at the time anti-abortionists groups from both the United States and France had made various threats towards Roussel-Uclaf pharmaceuticals. As a result, the French Minister of Health had temporarily ordered to stop the production of the drug.

These anti-abortionists also had an impact on the pharmaceutical company by threatening their opponent with economic reprisals if the company attempts to market the drug in the United States. This forced Roussel-Uclaf to make a statement to the public, stating that they have no intention to market RU-486 outside France. This was obviously one of the many reasons the drug had much difficulty in being passed for approval of usage in the United States by the FDA. Since 1989, RU-486 has been legally in use in France, but not without controversy.

After its re-introduction in France, many physicians were reluctant to prescribe RU-486 due to the widespread opposition among many French citizens. Even today RU-486 is the not the most widely used abortion method in France because the French medical communities remain cautious in its usage, due to many potential side effects which are not widely publicized by its supporters.

Is RU-486 a magic bullet? The so called French abortion pill involves the usage of not one, but two very powerful syn-

thetic hormones (mifepristone and misoprostol), in order to induce an abortion. This process involves at least three trips to the physician's office and a number of required blood tests. A woman undergoing this should not have any contraindications such as; smoking, high blood pressure, obesity to name a few, of which any combination of these along with the administration of the drug could prove deadly.

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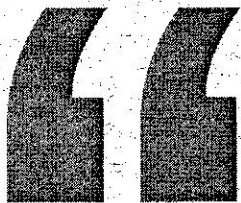
Many documented side effects outside the above named contraindications can also occur such as; nausea, vomiting, pelvic pain, spasm, excessive hemorrhage, possible later damage to uterine structures. The entire procedure can take over two weeks to complete and even then it is sometimes determined that a surgical abortion is necessary, despite the powerful drugs. And finally the long term effects of this drug on the female reproductive system has undergone sufficient studies and clinical trials to warrant its widespread usage. This may point to possible future problems in fertility later on, and women should be aware of the of the possible consequences prior to taking this method of abortion.

In my view RU-486 is not the magic bullet, but it is just another method of abortion, which has its dangers just as traditional surgical abortions do. Women should carefully exercise awareness before making a decision to use RU-486, because of its potential dangers.

The morning after drug should not be a replacement to traditional birth control methods. If a woman does decide to use this method, she should have a working level of comprehension before deciding it is a more convenient method of abortion. The magic lies not in the bullet, but perhaps in prevention in the first place.

Francine Perretta-Lisboa

Quote of the Week



"Privacy is not a right but a preference."

— Declan McCullagh
Journalist

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