



# The Brief

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## Pro-choice activists welcome defeat of Motion 312, prepare for next battle

By JOYCE ARTHUR

Despite the resounding defeat of the anti-choice Motion 312 in the House of Commons by a vote of 203 to 91 on Sept. 29th, the pro-choice movement has not been celebrating. The defeat was the biggest loss of an anti-choice motion or bill in Canadian history. So why the tears in our beer?

The motion, which wanted a Parliamentary Committee to examine whether fetuses should be deemed as "human beings" under our Criminal Code, should never have been deemed votable. Not only would it have threatened women's constitutional rights, it posed questions that the courts have already decided—fetuses are not legal persons under our Charter, Quebec's Civil Code, or common law.

Anti-choice MPs have become quite clever at hiding the true intent of their motions and bills, because to have any chance of success, they can no longer attack women's rights and abortion rights directly. When a motion is worded innocuously or a bill pretends to protect women, however, Parliamentarians may be fooled into taking it at face value. But the main goal of such initiatives is to establish a toehold from which to restrict abortion as far as possible—ideally to ban it completely. Parliament has no obligation to waste its time on such nonsense.

The 91 anti-choice MPs who voted for Motion 312 need to learn the following lessons: fertility control is the foundation of women's rights, women cannot achieve equality without contraception and legal abortion, and women's rights are human rights. MPs' personal views against those rights—even if most of their constituents agree—never gives them license to vote against human rights in Parliament. Canadians also witnessed the scandal of ten members of Harper's cabinet voting against their own government and leader in favour of the motion. Since the Harper government had promised to oppose the motion, Harper is accountable for the dishonourable behaviour of his ministers and should discipline them accordingly. In particular, when the Minister for Status of Women, Rona Ambrose, refused to step down after the many loud calls for her resignation, Harper should have personally handed her a pink slip.

In all the spilt ink and raised voices over Ambrose's Yes vote, one telling detail was overlooked by most. Ambrose justified her vote by tweeting her concern over discrimination against girls because of sex-selection abortion. The attack came the very next day. Conservative MP Mark Warawa introduced Motion 408 asking Parliament to "condemn discrimination against females

occurring through sex-selective pregnancy termination."

Of course, the timing of the new motion is a transparently manipulative ploy by the anti-choice movement to keep the momentum going after losing Motion 312, as well as try to put pro-choicers on the defensive. But we've been through this issue before and the pro-choice position on sex-selection abortion is consistent and principled.

Condemning the tools used to carry out sex selection is an unwise distraction. The problem is not abortion, ultrasounds, or urine and blood tests that predict gender—the problem is deeply ingrained societal prejudices that impels some people to choose boy babies over girl babies. The experience of China and India has shown the unworkability of laws criminalizing sex-selection abortion. Such laws are paternalistic and contradictory because they purport to protect women by restricting their rights, when in fact they compound discrimination against women.

Many women will resort to unsafe and illegal abortion to avoid having a girl, and some may even face abuse and violence from their families if they bear a girl. Other women may not want to raise a girl knowing she will be discriminated against in a patriarchal culture. The only solution to sex selection is to counter sexist beliefs and practices through public education, community-led initiatives, and progressive social policy that advances women's rights and status.

We must not forget that women's freedom is what most anti-choicers dislike more than anything. Cracking down on women's rights, including their sexuality and access to health care is the favourite strategy used by fundamentalists everywhere to gain power. Eternal vigilance is required to keep a lid on them.

The reaction of Canada's pro-choice movement to Motion 312 clearly reflects a keen understanding of the relentless risks to women's fundamental human rights and a determination to fight any inroad.

Joyce Arthur is the founder and Executive Director of



A pro-choice rally was held in Fredericton on November 1, 2012 to counter the presence of anti-choice group, 40 Days for Life, in front of the Morgentaler Clinic. Photo by Nicole MacFarlane.

Canada's national pro-choice group, the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC), which protects the legal right to abortion on request and works to improve access to quality abortion services.

This column appeared first on Rabble.ca

## Fredericton's Great Gathering spurs social innovation



Photo by Jenna Knorr

By MATTHEW HAYES

Municipal issues featured prominently at last month's Great Gathering, a community-led open space forum about issues that participants deemed important.

The meeting was organized by Greater Fredericton Social Innovation and took place on November 23rd and 24th at the Fredericton Convention Centre. The event drew about 320 people.

Open space is a meeting technique designed to allow people to bring up topics for discussion, and to participate in discussions that they think are important. The process begins by getting participants to generate an agenda by posting their interests to a wall. It is these interests which form the day's agenda.

According to Harrison Owen, who wrote the User's Guide for open space forums, the meetings are based on the

principle that the people who care are the ones who can get the job done, so whoever attends each topic are the right people for the conversation. Open space enables people who otherwise may not know of one another's passions to meet, network and create common projects. Participants are encouraged to "vote with their feet," moving to conversations they feel they can contribute to.

A similar meeting was held in February of 2010, and allowed people in the community to network on topic areas that they cared about. It also enabled the formation of a number of important community networks, including the Community Harvest Garden, the Fredericton Volunteer Centre, and Greater Fredericton Social Innovation.

Over the two day event, several groups on municipal matters were proposed, including a transit users' advisory group and a newcomers' advocacy committee, which could provide input to municipal and provincial governments.

Topics ranged from challenges faced by immigrants who move to New Brunswick to how to make Fredericton a more age-friendly city.

"Focusing on multiculturalism is great, and diversity is wonderful, but what is really hard about moving to a new country and a new city is the day to day stuff," said Nora Fathalipour, who urged members of a session on immigration in Fredericton to think of integration not in terms of festivals, but in terms of activities that both long-time residents and newcomers share in common.

Another session talked about the problems with public transit, and the need to design a service with more frequent service and more direct routes. "People know what the problems are with public transit," said Marie-Eve Landry, who participated in the session. "The solutions are there, we just have to demonstrate that enough people really care enough about this issue that something has to be done about it."


Members of the group who discussed making Fredericton a more age-friendly city pointed out that currently, residents in their senior years are cut off from social life in the city, and often housed in special care facilities in neighbourhoods where they cannot walk to amenities, or stay engaged in the community.

Participants talked about bicycle and pedestrian friendly

infrastructure, transparency in municipal government, municipal recycling and how to make Fredericton a more environmentally sustainable city.

"These are all really critical issues for the future of our city," said Margo Sheppard of Nature Trust, who participated in the discussions. "This brought together a lot of people from different backgrounds, and it was energizing to hear from so many passionate, dedicated and engaged people."

"The work starts now," said Judy Coates, a co-chair of Greater Fredericton Volunteers. Organizers hope that the two-day event will create new initiatives and carry forward new ideas about the city and the province.



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