

Suicide ruling should have all worried

To the Editor:

"Judge rules doctors can aid suicides" was the headline over a news item in The Newport Daily News of May 4. According to this news report, a federal judge in Seattle has ruled that terminally ill persons have a constitutional right to the assistance of a physician in committing suicide.

The judge reached this conclusion even though the citizens of the state of Washington defeated an initiative to legalize doctor-assisted suicide and euthanasia of terminally ill patients in 1991.

Since according to the news article about 30 states ban assisted suicide, and this was the first time any judge had ever found such a law unconstitutional, one might reasonably wonder what provision in the U.S. Constitution protects, not a right to commit suicide — that is, to kill oneself — but a right to help kill someone else?

In the words of the judge, the answer is that this newly discovered right "is the same as the right to choose an abortion or refuse life support." In other words, there is no direct support for such a right in the Constitution, but it is derived by a process of interpretation, just as Roe vs. Wade was in 1973.

There are obvious differences between refusing life support, which is simply not prolonging life, and taking affirmative measures to shorten a life, as by pumping carbon monoxide into a person's lungs. But it seems to me that the judge's other comparison — with abortion — is apt. Many of us in the pro-life movement have long believed that it was only a matter of time before the rationale for abortion would be applied at the other end of the human life span.

We are living in a culture that is increasingly willing to see death as the answer to problems. I am not talking only about abortion and euthanasia. Rising crime rates and overcrowded prisons? Plug in the electric chair. Third World nations getting out of control? Bomb 'em into submission.

The kids in our nation's cities have gotten the message too. "You got an attitude? Who you starin' at?" BLAM! Blow him away ... Dispute resolution by Smith & Wesson.

Do you really think there is no connection between these illustrations? That we as a nation can sanction the ripping out of unborn babies from their mothers' wombs and the snuffing out of old peoples' lives and then tell kids, "Hey, don't shoot each other! Death doesn't solve anything."

What can we do to halt the march toward death? I would say, in your own way stand up for life. Be sure of this, the day will come when we in Rhode Island will have to deal with assisted suicides and euthanasia. The question each one of us should ask ourselves is, which side will I be on? And am I willing to stand up for what I believe?

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not trying to wave a red flag in front of those of you who call yourself "pro-choice" and support the legal right to an abortion. Though I think you are mistaken, I understand that you care about women and the harsh consequences of some unplanned pregnancies. I am not questioning your good faith, your morals, or anything else.

But in the light of this momentous legal decision, I would ask you to think through your position again. Even if you come to the same conclusion on abortion, do you agree with that federal judge in Seattle that euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide are, in principle, really the same as abortion? And if so, where does it stop?

Is there any possibility that pro-lifers and pro-choicers could be allies on this one? Or do you line up with the grinning doctor of death?

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