

Canadians mark 20 year anniversary of legalized abortion

by Sarah Millar
CUP Ontario Bureau Chief,
with files from Nick Moore

TORONTO (CUP) -- January 28 marked the 20th anniversary of the Morgentaler decision, the Supreme Court of Canada's landmark ruling that decriminalized abortion.

But 20 years later, some argue that not much has really changed. Access to abortion still remains a concern, especially in rural Canada, and wait times are high across the country. Others are continuing to fight to have abortion abolished again with a new national ad campaign.

Ontario is home to the longest wait time for an abortion, where it sits at an average of six weeks.

"Ontario is home to the top three longest wait times in the country with six weeks in three different cities in Ontario," said Jessica Shaw, a researcher with Canadians for Choice, a non-profit, pro-choice organization.

Following Ontario's last provincial election, and some heavy lobbying from rights groups, Premier Dalton McGuinty increased funding to the city's clinics and the wait times there

have since decreased a bit.

"Specifically in Ottawa, being the capital of our country [the wait times were] horrendous and embarrassing for being six weeks for such a time-sensitive procedure. And because of that, just since the re-election of the McGuinty government, the wait times in Ottawa have decreased with an increase in funding. That was very exciting. But absolutely, wait times are still a major issue in Ontario," Shaw said.

But rural areas are still hit hardest with limits to access. In fact, Shaw said, there is only one provider in Ontario above the Trans-Canada Highway and that doctor is looking to retire. With no one to take his place, Shaw estimated that in less than two years, Ottawa could be the northernmost point in Ontario where a woman could receive an abortion.

She also said that with fewer young medical students who remember the fight for the Morgentaler ruling, there are fewer graduating physicians who feel the need to provide abortions.

"There's not the understanding on why it's necessary to become an abortion provider, so there's not as many new, young medical students or physicians who are willing to provide the service."

Most women getting abortions are between the ages of 20-24 in Canada, Shaw said. Many of these women, because of their age, may not realize that the right to an abortion was not guaranteed when they were born.

"Absolutely there's a lack of understanding about the importance of this decision, and about the importance of talking about these issues so that we don't revert back to how it was prior to 1988 when women were dying and when women were having all kinds of complications because women didn't have access to the kinds of abortion services," she explained.

She said that it also comes down to safety. Comparing with other countries, she noted, women continue to have abortions regardless of their legality and so it makes sense for the procedure to be legal and safe in Canada.

Canadians for Choice emphasizes the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all women, and provides a partial list of abortion providers in the country on its website.

Although, some rural providers are not comfortable with the listing of their information, so it is just a partial list. However, Canadians for Choice has a toll-free number women can call to inquire about the provider closest

to them, and the information will be provided. The toll-free number is a 24-hour service.

Other groups are taking the anniversary from a different angle. The Right to Life Association funded a national advertising campaign designed to spark debate on abortion.

Running on city buses across the country, the advertisements ask viewers if abortion laws in Canada have gone too far. The ads have been banned in at least three Canadian cities, including Hamilton, Ont., Fredericton, N.B. and St. John's, N.L.

"Mainly it's an educational campaign," Peter Ryan, executive director of Right to Life in New Brunswick, said. "It's surprising and we thought it was kind of intolerant and repressive of free speech on the part of the city."

While Ryan's group is protesting the banning of the Right to Life advertisements on freedom of speech grounds, Shaw stressed the importance in keeping the dialogue about abortion rights in the public eye so that the country does not return to where it was before Jan. 28, 1988.

"We do need to continue to talk about these issues - we don't want to return to the dire circumstances that surrounded abortion in the past," she said.

Your future at UNB: Decided by a hunch?

BETHANY'S BRIEFING



by
Bethany Vail
VP Academic

an opinion

I am currently an undergraduate student Senator, as well as Vice-President Academic of the Student Union. Senate was the first involvement I had with the Student Union. I had a sit down with Jill O'Reilly, who was the VP Academic at the time, and she explained to me the workings of UNB's Senate.

As a first year student, I was very eager to get involved and help out my fellow students any way I could. Although I found Senate intimidating at first, I had an eagerness to learn. Once elected as student Senators, we are asked to serve on some of the various Senate Committees. One of the first committees I asked about was the Student Standings and Promotions Committee (SS&P). This committee deals with student academic offense cases and "standing" cases, such as requests for late W's from courses. It was suggested to me as a student still wet behind the ears, that I leave that committee until I had more Senate experience. I did not quite understand this rational, but obliged.

This year marks my second year serving on the Fredericton Senate. This time around as the Vice President Academic, one of my jobs is to coordinate with the other undergraduate Senators to select students to serve on various Senate committees. The Student Standings and Promotions Committee was brought to my attention as I was one of only two student Senators that would be in Fredericton over the summer and I would be needed for quorum. Therefore we decided that I would serve on this committee this year.

Eagerly I trooped off to my first SS&P meeting in the summer, willing to listen with an open ear to the trials of my fellow students and ensure they had a fair hearing. I must say that I have been disappointed thus far in serving my time on this committee. At my first meeting I did not know what to think of the goings-on. I went into it expecting there to be guidelines laid down on how we were to treat each case. Instead I heard loud opinions from every corner of the room with no real substance. Committee members voted on "hunches"

or "feelings" about the students, not on policy or concrete guidelines. Often awkward jokes would be told in the middle of these meetings where students' futures are at stake. As a student currently living through the everyday stresses of university and personal life, I do not take lightly the current direction of this committee and the current attitude that surrounds it.

This issue seemed to escalate even farther when SS&P held its policy meeting last Tuesday, January 28th. A discussion about making the SS&P sub-committees change from three people to one made some ripples when committee members realized that the person reviewing cases - who would be the associate dean in each faculty - was not a member on SS&P. How could they possibly be taught how to properly respond to the cases the "SS&P way," wondered SS&P members? Some committee members were unsettled to think that Associate Deans may be making decisions that do align with SS&P practices.

But what are the SS&P practices? The student Senators brought this up, to which committee members replied that SS&P has no set practices. Apparently, SS&P does not set precedents so strongly that they could be written down. This appears false to me, as in my time on this committee financial reasons alone will not grant a positive outcome to a student. Apparently there are written guidelines for this committee, but I have yet to see them for myself. I question whether anyone follows them, or if they simply vote on outcomes based on their own personal opinion. I have sat in the room with different members at each meeting and very similar cases. Simply based on whom the other committee members are who are sitting beside me, I have seen some severe variances in outcomes based on personality. A student's fate should not be resting on individuality.

Looking back now, perhaps as a first year student, the other Senators were trying to shield me from SS&P because they knew the way it worked; or the way it didn't work. However as the Vice President Academic and as advocate for all undergraduate students, I believe this system must change. I understand how the administration and faculty feel that informal processes work best in favour for positive student outcomes. I am not asking that SS&P be turned into a formal affair with lawyers at every turn. I am simply requesting that the university committee take this matter seriously. Lay down some guidelines to ensure real fairness, no matter what individual may be partaking in that particular meeting. I would expect nothing less from my university.

Welcome back, STUdents

by Lauren Kennedy

After what was an extended winter break for 2,600 students at St. Thomas University, they are finally back to class starting February 5.

With the assistance of a mediator from the provincial government, the strike ended with a joint application for binding arbitration, which simply means that both parties agree in good faith to a decision that an impartial mediator makes. With his advice, the parties sought binding arbitration with their collective agreements and together, they negotiated a back-to-work protocol.

Employment started for faculty on February 4 and the following day, students are back to class. The original start date was supposed to be January 3.

Students are able to breathe a sigh of relief knowing their semester has not been lost. The semester was saved



Andrew Meade / The Brunswickian

St. Thomas University faculty was locked out December 27 until February 5, out for 37 days, ending with a joint application for binding arbitration.

because key dates were changed, such as the exam schedule and the spring convocation, although the March break has been left intact. The semester was extended by 11 days.

Following the trail of STU

Following what looks like the popular thing to do, about 500 college janitors along with jail guards and human resource councilors have gone on strike. Five New Brunswick community college campuses have had to cancel some classes

because of dirty classrooms and washrooms, while other janitors only agree to work on half-day schedules.

Currently, their union is in talks with the government, but refused what the government said was their last offer.

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