



# Women speak for themselves this time

**Every legislative session has a moment or** two of sparkling dialogue that perfectly encapsulates the difference between the two major parties. In 2017, it was the moment when an “English Only” bill was introduced in the Nevada Assembly by Republican Assemblymember Richard McArthur. Democratic Leader Teresa Benitez-Thompson referred it to committee in perfect Spanish.

This year’s moment arrived last week in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee during a hearing on Senate Bill 179, a bill that removes criminal penalties related to abortion and updates the informed consent provisions in Nevada statutes. Republican Sen. Scott Hammond objected to eliminating the requirement that a doctor ask a woman if she is married, saying “As a father, you want to ask so it makes her think for a second about the consequences she’s undertaking. I think it’s really relevant, if not medically relevant. This is a highly-charged event in somebody’s life.” The bill’s sponsor,

Democratic Sen. Yvanna Cancela, ignored the insulting inference that women cannot think for themselves and calmly pointed out “It is not the doctor’s duty to inform a partner of a woman’s decision. The same kind of requirement is not put into any other procedure. A man is not asked his marital status before he gets a vasectomy.”

Cancela’s bill updates state reproductive rights by decriminalizing abortion, including removing penalties for women who self-induce an abortion, an act that is currently a category B felony. It also updates the informed consent provisions by deleting the requirement that doctors explain the “emotional” implications of an abortion, leaving medical communication and support where it belongs, in the privacy of the doctor-patient relationship, as in any other medical procedure.

SB179 lines up nicely with a 1990 voter-approved referendum to protect reproductive rights in state law. Regardless of any future action by the increasingly conservative U.S. Supreme

Court, the right to seek an abortion—up to 24-weeks—was protected in state statutes by nearly two-thirds of voters. It can now be changed only by another vote of the people.

Other bills also strengthen reproductive rights this session. Senate Democratic Leader Nicole Cannizzaro introduced SB 361, which would reduce untimely pregnancies by allowing pharmacists to prescribe, order and dispense contraception to patients without a prescription from a primary care provider. SB 94 would appropriate \$6 million for community-based family planning grants. And AB 295, sponsored by Assm. Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod, will attempt, once again, to require factual, evidence-based sexuality education in Nevada’s schools.

The Republican Party may object to these efforts to empower women to take charge of their reproductive health, but the majority of Nevadans who want government to stay out of their most personal health choices appreciate them.

Nevadans can also be happy with the implementation of a new reporting system for sexual harassment claims created by the 2017 Democratic-led Legislature which seems to be working well, given the sudden resignation of Democratic Assm. Mike Sprinkle. Women can now file complaints through an outside law firm without their names and the specifics of the alleged behavior becoming partisan fodder. If the private investigation results in a humiliating public resignation, presumably it will serve as a deterrent to other would-be harassers. Legislators understand this behavior will no longer be tolerated, providing a needed cleansing to an institution that for too long accepted sexual harassment as inevitable in the intensity of a legislative session where legislators lose their self-control.

Nevada women are flexing their muscles this year, demanding a harassment-free workplace and the ability to make their own decisions about their health care. That’s progress. □

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