

Woman Activist Urges Defeat of Measure 6

by Jerry Garner

"My personal belief is that abortion is a very personal decision and it should be left up to the woman. I think women should have access to adequate health care. If a woman is unable to pay for it and relies on the government for all her health care, an abortion should be an option included in the health care package. Ballot Measure 6 that is before Oregon voters would deny that option to the poorest of the poor women in the state."

This statement was made by Gaye Williams, Communication Director for The Religious Coalition for

Abortion Rights in Washington, D.C. Williams was in Portland for the Religious Coalition conference.

Williams said Measure 6 is a bad amendment, saying, if passed by Oregon's voters, would prohibit the state from funding abortions, with the exception of preventing the death of the mother. "There would be no exception for women who are pregnant as a result of forcible rape, for children who are victims of incest, or for many women with serious health problems such as kidney disease or diabetes."

Furthermore, she said, if Ballot Measure 6 is passed, taxpayers will pay more, because these women will be forced to have the babies and will become dependent on the state, resulting in the state spending more money on that child in welfare benefits.

Williams was asked whether she believed that Roe vs. Wade, the ruling by the Supreme Court legalizing abortion, would some day be overturned by the Supreme Court. She replied, "If the Supreme Court changes under a highly conservative president such as Ronald Reagan,



Actress, activist, Gaye Williams

Photo by Richard J. Brown

we don't expect the high court to outlaw abortion to make it illegal. What they are more likely to do is up to the individual states."

Williams said since Reagan has been in office, there has been an

increase in militancy in opposition to abortion. "Reagan is the first president to come out strongly and say I support the anti-choice movement. His statements have really opened the gates to people who, I

feel, are not coming so much from a principal opposition, a moral position, but who would love to see a whole laundry list of things happen that will be very detrimental to the rights of poor people, the rights of women and the rights of people of color. I think that's the heart of what they're trying to accomplish."

The Harvard-Ratcliff graduate said these people are trying to get women out of the work force and out of politics and are trying to turn the clock back on women and minorities in this country. "I also feel there is a political element that is flourishing under Reagan that is using perhaps the real concerns that people are having about women's health and the rights of the fetus and twisting it into an abortion issue. They call themselves 'pro-lifers', when, in fact, their policy promotes death."

Williams said although she believes that women should have the right to an abortion on demand, she feels that more should be done to prevent the need for abortion. "If more sex education classes are available, the demand for abortion will decrease. This has been proven in parts of the country where they have tried school-based clinics, and the rate of teen pregnancy dropped."

Besides being active in women issues, Williams is a successful artist. Last Tuesday at King Facility, she gave a one-woman recital show about the problems in the everyday life of Black women to about 50 people.

Her visit to King Facility was sponsored by the Portland Chapter of the National Black Women's Health Project. Bobbi L. Gary is president of the Portland Chapter.

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