

# The 'Count of Oxytocin'

**B**OSTON — Do you worry that things are getting too touchy-feely on the home front? Are you afraid that the plea for common ground is becoming the all-too-common wisdom? Do you wonder if the culture warriors are becoming pacifists?

Cynics, take heart. We offer you advance word from the troops preparing for Monday's annual March for Life marking the 34th anniversary of *Roe v.*

**Ellen Goodman**



Wade. The parade's theme this year is: "Thou Shalt Protect the Equal Right to Life of Each Innocent Human in Existence at Fertilization. No Exception! No Compromise!"

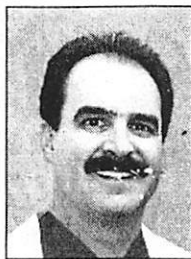
No exception! No compromise! Lots of exclamation points!

For at least a dozen years, anti-abortion activists tried to portray their pro-choice opponents as the extremists. In one Republican Congress after another, bills such as those banning so-called "partial-birth abortion" were aimed more at moving public opinion than reducing the need for abortion. Pro-lifers had their eyes on the single prize of finding Supreme Court justices who would overturn *Roe*.

But gradually, from Terri Schiavo to Plan B to stem cell opposition, the right wing overreached. In that reddest of states, South Dakota, voters in November repealed an abortion ban that echoed the theme: No exception! No compromise!

Meanwhile, pro-choice groups spent those same years with their ear to the middle ground, listening to the people who want to keep abortion legal but less numerous. If there are 3 million unplanned pregnancies and half of them end up in abortion, you do the math. The point on which most Americans agree is reducing unplanned pregnancies.

It's not an accident that one of the first bills in the Senate with a new Democratic majority was the Prevention First Act, a wide-ranging family planning



Eric Keroack

initiative. Rep. Louise Slaughter will follow next week with a similar bill described in one mouthful as a "bipartisan, bicameral, pro-choice, pro-life innovative approach to reducing unintended pregnancies."

Then, Reps. Rosa DeLauro and Tim Ryan, a pro-choice-pro-life duo, will reintroduce an omnibus family planning and family support bill with the lumbering title, "The Reducing the Need for Abortions and Supporting Parents Act."

All these bills would, as DeLauro says, "lead us forward instead of always being defensive." All of them would at the very least expand family planning programs to more women, especially poor women.

But there is a roadblock to this common ground. The man overseeing it is Eric Keroack, the brand new head of the Office of Population Affairs. Keroack has, to put it mildly, marched to a different drummer. One heard more often in the March for Life.

As Cecile Richards, head of Planned Parenthood, says, "You have to search far and wide to find a doctor who opposes family planning to run the nation's family planning program." This White House found one. The President picked Keroack just weeks after the election delivered anti-choice defeats. "He didn't get the memo," says Nancy Keenan, head of NARAL Pro-Choice America, in what will be the epitaph for this presidency, at home and abroad.

If you missed the first gasp at this appointment, Keroack is an OB-GYN who was the medical director for A Woman's Concern, a network of faith-based "crisis pregnancy centers" in Massachusetts. This group not only promotes abstinence until marriage, it regards birth control as "demeaning to women, degrading of human sexuality and adverse to human health and happiness."

Keroack's PowerPoint lectures should be regulars on "The Colbert Report." In the most infamous, titled appropriately "If I Only Had a Brain," he teaches that "premarital sex is really modern germ warfare." His unique 'scientific explanation' of why multiple sex partners are bad has to do with, uh, oxytocin. "People who have misused their sexual faculty and become bonded to multiple persons will diminish the power of oxytocin to maintain a permanent bond with an individual." More sex leads to less bonding? This ranks with old-time warnings that you-know-what leads to warts.

Yet Keroack is supposed to be the nation's chief advocate for family planning. This is from the man who will have power to funnel and direct funds.

His appointment has produced a furor that has yet to diminish. Or to succeed. The Department of Health and Human Services has wanly defended Keroack, saying he'd actually prescribed birth control in his private practice. By now we've gotten used to ideologues imitating scientists, whether the subject is global warming or evolution. We've gotten used to appointed foxes guarding assorted henhouses.

But on this 34th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, most Americans have wearily come to agree on the best way to reduce abortions. Prevention First? Not when the President has handed the deed for common ground to the Count of Oxytocin.

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# Forum

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