

## Susan B. Anthony and the abortion question

**M**uch has been written about the Susan B Anthony List in Washington DC, a PAC that supports pro-life candidates. Its recent announcement to support Donald Trump generated opposition by the Susan B Anthony House in Rochester, questioning not whether Anthony, an anti-slavery Republican, would support Trump, but whether Anthony was really against abortion.

The years of publication of Susan B Anthony newspaper *The Revolution* coincided with the notoriety and public condemnation of abortionist Madame Restell and her numerous arrests. Suffragist articles did not condone the practice, but actually used Anthony's newspaper as a mouthpiece to universally and unequivocally condemn it.

In addition, Anthony refused to accept any ads for abortion, a policy that was reiterated and explained by her editors over 20 times [Parker Pillsbury, co-editor of *The Revolution* with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, explaining the newspaper's policy]. The suffragists were outraged enough to know thinly disguised ads for "removing obstructions" were the same thing as what they called "revolting outrages" and "a crying evil".

Abortion was legal prior to "quickening," the point when it was thought the unborn came to life. To counter this falsity, Anthony's *The Revolution* ran lectures by Physician and Professor Anna Densmore French. Her mission, along with providing affordable medicine to poor and single women, was to break the silence of pregnancy and sexual reproduction and educate about the embryo. "... women would rarely dare to destroy the product of conception if they did not fully believe the little one was devoid of life."

In a lecture on the suffrage opinion on reproductive rights a couple years ago at the Susan B Anthony House, Dr. Alison Parker, women's historian at SUNY-Brockport said using our contemporary pro-choice position is not useful in determining suffrage thinking and it is risky to think through our current "women's bodies" lens. Childbirth was more dangerous than abortion, but suffrage opposition to abortion still was unanimous.

Women demanded jobs and education and independence the vote would afford. These, they claimed, would honor the traditional value of motherhood. Abortion, they thought, encouraged male license and promiscuity. Abortion facilitated uncontrolled male appetites, often ignited by liquor consumption. In Anthony's "social purity" speech in Chicago in 1875, she blamed alcohol and equated the evils of abortion, paramour shootings and wife murder.

It seems to defy logic, at a time when giving birth to a child was more dangerous than abortion, when women were not independent to raise their own children, and unmarried motherhood was condemned, our foremothers opposed abortion. They realized their own

liberty could not be won at the expense of the lives of their own children.

Neither presidential candidate represents Anthony's thinking about community and non-violence for women and children. What we need is a Susan B Anthony party that doesn't pit women and society against children, born and unborn.

"Quack medicine venders, however rich, proud and pretentious, foeticides and infanticides, should be classed together and regarded with shuddering horror by the whole human race ... Let us learn to read authors between their lines, and to judge of newspapers largely by their advertisements." (26 March 1868).

Kathy Peters  
Waterloo

*Peters is a member of the Board of Directors of the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace in Adams, MA, and former director of the Seneca Museum of Waterways & Industry, Seneca Fall (2004-06)*

### Do you believe in promises?

**D**o you believe the promises of someone who doesn't have a track record of knowing how to keep those promises?

Having worked in government before moving here, I learned it's a different world in Congress. Knowing how to work with other members makes the difference in representing us, yet no representative can accomplish everything they set out to do. Legislation is a long and winding process that takes time and patience.

That's why I support Congressman Tom Reed. We can't agree with everything anyone does in any walk of life. But to keep a knowledgeable member of Congress representing us is of more value than buying into only promises.

Every time we have contacted Congressman Reed's office with a question or for assistance with an issue facing our business or something in the community the response has been helpful – and efficient. Keeping in contact with your legislative representatives is the key to success for us and them. Simply complaining is a vicious circle with the complainer achieving nothing.

Carol Strassburg Doolittle  
Trumansburg (Covert)

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