

So I honor those persons who say they have legitimate concerns, they have the right to differ, but to deny a person the opportunity to defend himself I think is certainly un-American.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I think there is an erosion of an opportunity to have debate around the issue of abortion. If people really want to have an honest debate about it, they ought to do that, and not find a way to have a way of destroying a man's profession. We can simply be honest in our debate as to where we feel on certain issues, but we ought to be honorable and recognize the service this gentleman has given.

Why I am particularly interested in this gentleman, because he has not only come with a distinguished professional career, but he comes with a service of commitment to the community around teenaged pregnancy and around those issues.

We say we want to do something about welfare reform, so this is an opportunity, I think, to have a gentleman both of the profession and service.

DR. HENRY FOSTER, AN EMINENTLY QUALIFIED SURGEON GENERAL NOMINEE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York [Mr. ENGEL] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, when I hear the attacks being made against the President's nominee for Surgeon General, Dr. Henry Foster, I must say that I have never seen such a vicious and mean-spirited mood in this town. This really has to stop. We have to return some civility to the process of confirming nominees.

Mr. Speaker, why would any professional subject themselves to be nominated to serve here in Washington when, by doing so, they know they will be ripped from pillar to post?

It is the right of a President to select nominees, and it is the right of that nominee to get a fair hearing before Congress. Dr. Foster should have an opportunity to lay his record before the Congress and before the American people. I think it is an impressive record that, once aired, will impress many people.

The so-called controversy over Dr. Foster has been fueled by a discussion over one single issue—an issue, I might add, that should not be used as a litmus test. We have hardly heard a word about the decades of caring service Dr. Foster has provided.

Yes, Dr. Foster performed abortions. The last time I looked, Mr. Speaker, abortion was not illegal in the United States. There may be some who do not like the fact that abortion is legal in this country, but Dr. Foster should not be held hostage to their views.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Foster ran a program called I Have a Future, which urges teenagers to practice abstinence.

The program was honored as a Point of Light by President Bush. Why are we not focusing on the positive message that is the heart of Dr. Foster's work?

It is most disturbing that some Members of Congress are looking to score political points on this issue. It appears that they are willing to put their own personal ambitions ahead of the well-being of the American people, especially our teenagers.

I have not seen any evidence that disqualifies Dr. Foster for the post of Surgeon General. In fact, he is eminently qualified for the job. I urge my colleagues to step back and allow the process to proceed. Let Dr. Foster have a fair hearing before Congress. If he has a fair hearing, I have no doubt that he will be confirmed.

Mr. Speaker, I now yield to my colleague and good friend, the gentleman from New York [Mrs. LOWEY].

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Mrs. LOWEY. Mr. Speaker, the right to terminate a pregnancy is contained in our Constitution, affirmed by our legislatures, upheld by our courts, and supported by the American people. It has been the law of the land in all 50 States for over 20 years, and by vast majorities, the public believes it should remain so.

But today, a war is being waged on that right. For a radical minority, it is a violent war, unleashed on doctors and clinics from Pensacola to Brookline. For others, it is a cold war of intimidation, fought with ugly scare tactics, innuendo, and political pressure.

A new front in the assault on women's health has opened up on the floor of Congress, and its first casualty is the reputation of an outstanding physician ready to serve the public, Dr. Henry Foster.

Dr. Foster is among the most respected citizens of Tennessee. He has had an extraordinary career as an obstetrician and educator, treating literally thousands of patients, counseling teenagers, confronting every kind of social and medical dilemma, and dealing with the human consequences of our public health decisions.

Dr. Foster's commitment to the prevention of teen pregnancy, perhaps the most urgent social challenge facing us today, establishes him as a national authority on the subject.

His passion for the children of America, and his real experience with teenagers in troubled relationships make him ideally suited to be Surgeon General of the United States.

Dr. Foster is the right person, at the right time, for the right job.

And that is why it is so tragic to see his record and character recklessly attacked by individuals who have done nothing to promote our Nation's health, and entirely too much to threaten it.

The antichoice strategy is clear.

Because they cannot achieve their real objective of criminalizing abor-

tion, antichoice forces are instead of pursuing a strategy of de facto abolition—making abortion unavailable by stigmatizing doctors, and by discouraging the study of abortion procedures in medical schools.

Sadly, those tactics have been all too successful. Today, less than 20 percent of the counties in America have an abortion provider—less than 20. For the women who live in the other 80 percent, the right to choose is a paper promise, growing thinner everyday, and threatening to disappear entirely.

It's really quite simple. If you can't make abortion a crime, then just treat abortion providers as though they were criminals. And that is what's happening now.

Make no mistake, this is no numbers game—whether it's 1 or 12 or 40 is irrelevant.

And there is no question about Dr. Foster's character and ability—he has proven both, over and over.

It is the right to choose itself that is under siege, because if a man like Dr. Foster can be denied confirmation on this basis—for engaging in a legal, appropriate, responsible medical practice—then doctors everywhere will shrink from the challenge of reproductive health. And women will return to the back alley and the emergency room.

Opponents of this nomination may not have the guts to spell it out, but they know full well that this is a veiled attack on the right to choose.

I am the mother of three children. And though I have never had to face the trauma of an unplanned pregnancy, I know what it means to raise a family, to care for child, and to assume responsibility for the next generation.

There is no more personal or emotional decision than the one to bring a new life into the world.

Dr. Foster has done a tremendous amount to help young people come to grips with the weight of that decision, and to discourage the irresponsibility and the ignorance which can lead to teen pregnancy and abortion.

Like most Americans, he believes that abortion should be safe, legal, and rare. Unlike so many of his critics, he has actually done something to make that goal a reality.

It would be a disgrace for this Congress to deny to the American people the benefit of Dr. Foster's service simply because he performed his duty as a medical doctor, and obeyed the Constitution of the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, our children deserve better. We will fight to preserve their health, their rights, and their future.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CUNNINGHAM). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. LIPINSKI] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. LIPINSKI addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]