

Pro-life movement continues to gain momentum

Activists believe some federal legislation for protection of unborn will be in place within 10 years

By Agnieszka Krawczynski

After 25 years with no law against abortion, one activist believes change is on the horizon. Reflecting on the recent actions of pro-life activists, Mike Schouten, executive director of the weneedaLAW.ca campaign, is hopeful that change is coming.

"I see Canada shifting right before our eyes," said Schouten. He is optimistic that this country will soon enact legislation in defence of the unborn.

The weneedaLAW.ca campaign focuses on amassing support for federal abortion legislation. In addition to organizing and participating in pro-life rallies, weneedaLAW.ca engages with politicians and the media, encouraging them to change the status quo.

"Largely, the momentum is due to the youth that are getting involved in the pro-life movement," he explained. "The constant theme I'm hearing is: wow! there are so many young people here."

A few years ago, Schouten said the average pro-lifer was a grey-haired Caucasian male; now the faces organizing rallies and getting involved belong to young university, college, and high school students.

Increased secular media attention and the viewpoints of some journalists also fuel Schouten's optimism.

"In the past, if (secular media) wrote about pro-lifers, they would do so with a very jaded perspective."

Schouten now sees reporters taking a different approach, and sometimes using his campaign's talking points. "If respected journalists are starting to call for an end to the status quo, that tells us that we are coming closer to that actually becoming a reality."

Schouten's own articles on the topic are reaching the public. His op-ed pieces have been published in the *National Post*, *Vancouver Sun*, and others.

Mark Penninga, executive director of the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA), the parent



Clayton Richard Long / Special to The B.C. Catholic

Mike Schouten, executive director of the weneedaLAW.ca campaign, speaks at the 2013 March for Life in Victoria. Schouten believes the pro-life movement is gaining ground and that legislation in its favour will be enacted sooner rather than later.

organization of weneedaLAW.ca, shares Schouten's optimism. He believes Canada will pass a pro-life law within a decade.

"There is no doubt that pre-born-human rights have been gaining traction in the past two years in Canada," stated Penninga.

"We saw two huge motions in parliament from MPs Stephen Woodworth and Mark Warawa which served as catalysts for debate in the mainstream media. This in turn sparked grassroots action among pro-life Canadians."

Thanks to small steps, Schouten said, the debate has taken on a different tone. The extremes no longer hog the media spotlight.

"The entire national conversation is no longer framed by the Joyce Arthurs of the world, who are among the five per cent of Canadians who advocate for full-out unrestricted access to abortion ... and the small number of Canadians who believe abortion should be outright banned."

Instead, he said, the discussion now engages the 80 or 90 per cent of those in favour of some degree of protection for the unborn; for instance, 92 per cent think abortion based on gender should be illegal, according to a 2011 poll.

"Change happens in incremental shifts," he explained. "That's all we can expect in a secular society

like Canada."

The executive director of ARPA agreed. "There is no good reason why Canada should be the only country in the western world without laws protecting preborn children."

However enacting leg-

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islation that limits abortion worries some pro-lifers about moral compromise. By putting forward a statement protecting certain unborn children, they fear they implicitly permit the death of others.

Schouten does not see it

that way. "A compromise is always when two or more parties come together and concede something to come up with a decision that benefits all of them," he clarified.

An example of compromise, he said, would be if pro-choice activists wanted abortion up to 32 weeks of pregnancy and pro-lifers wanted to limit it after 24 weeks, so they settled on 28 weeks.

But, he continued, since the pro-choice side already has abortion through 40 weeks, if pro-lifers ask for limits after 12 weeks, and law consequently limits abortion after 12 weeks, it is not a compromise.

"As pro-lifers, we have nothing, so we're not giving anything away," Schouten stated.

By chipping at the edges of abortion-on-demand, Schouten said the debate will continue to shift. "Why would you protect a child at 20 weeks and not at four?"

WeneedaLAW.ca's mis-

sion is to restrict abortion "to the greatest extent possible."

Schouten sees Ottawa as the last "hurdle" for the pro-life movement. "We are living in an environment where it still is toxic, especially on Parliament Hill, to discuss abortion and anything related to it."

He urges pro-lifers to encourage MPs and MLAs to introduce legislation and support them when they do.

Schouten sees the pro-life movement as cyclical. As a groundswell of support for life grows, MPs gain courage. As MPs get vocal, the media pick it up. When the media broadcast the information, more Canadians get on board.

He hopes the work of weneedaLAW.ca and other groups dedicated to rights for the unborn will continue to engage the public and build on the increasing momentum.

"This is winnable."
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Educators unite in anti-bullying efforts

Online Reporting Tool an asset to Bully Free Schools campaign

By Agnieszka Krawczynski

The Catholic Independent Schools of British Columbia (CISBC) have formally joined the province's Ministry of Education in its efforts to end bullying in B.C. schools.

"It was obvious that the two initiatives should work hand in hand, so we started working together, and the culmination of those efforts expressed itself on June 1, 2013," said Doug Lauson, superintendent of the Catholic Independent Schools of the Vancouver Archdiocese (CISVA).

Though both groups had anti-bullying programs in place before that date, CISBC's inclusion in the Ministry of Education's Expect Respect and A Safe Education (ERASE) reporting tool marks a united attempt to make schools safer.



www.erasebullying.ca

"We are pleased that the Catholic schools of B.C. have chosen to work with us to promote student safety throughout the province," stated Sherri Mohoruk, superintendent of Safe Schools in B.C.

CISBC is the first independent school group to participate in ERASE's online reporting tool, she said.

The tool allows students to anonymously report bullying incidents as they happen, on their phones or online. Lauson sees it as valuable for reducing ha-

rassment in schools.

It "complements what we are trying to do. It is confidential and is structured so that our schools can respond as soon as possible in addressing bullying issues," Lauson commented.

The reporting tool works against bullying alongside CISBC's Bully Free Schools campaign, which was implemented in January.

"In meetings over the last year, the superintendents of all five dioceses discussed at length how

we were going to be proactive in making our schools more safe," explained Beverly Pulyk.

Pulyk, superintendent of the Catholic Independent Schools of the Nelson Diocese, said CISBC's focus is on human dignity and respect.

Bully Free Schools includes posters, policies, and links to resources, including the Ministry of Education anti-bullying program. ERASE, rolled out last year, incorporates various resources for students, parents, and teachers in addition to the online reporting tool.

"It is part of our faith and Catholic school culture," Lauson stated, "that Catholic schools are places where the community of the faithful can learn and worship as one, without fear of bullying."

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