

In the next few weeks, many of us will have numerous conversations with friends and strangers about The Right to Reproductive Freedom Initiative (Amendment 3). They may be encouraging, commiserate, heated, or just brief enough to communicate that, in this case, bad things really do come in threes. My recent interactions on this topic have created some fresh observations and confirmed some enduring principles. Here are a few:

1. Compassion always has its place. As a matter of fact, the more someone fights against you, the more likely they have wounds (often from a past abortion experience) that need to be acknowledged. Being heard can magically diffuse anger and defensiveness.
2. Most self-identifying pro-choicers do not want abortion to be legal past (the ever-so-popular buzzword) “viability.” Many not after the first trimester or a detected heartbeat. A significant contingency will cite rape and incest as the reasons abortion should be legal (but are they willing to be complicit in legalizing abortion through all 9 months for the sake of abortions that happen .7% of the time?). We can work with all these views. We can be allies in the fight against enshrined abortion in our state constitution without being in complete agreement. We can join forces to take down a bully.
3. Speaking of trimesters, I encounter people who deny that late-term abortions occur. Whether they are in denial or sincere, here are the latest statistics I have:
  - a. Third-trimester abortions occur 1.1% of the time, so they may not happen often, but they do happen. The bigger point to make is that the Right to Reproductive Freedom Initiative leaves terms such as “viability” and “health of the mother” undefined, which will open the door wide open for it to happen more often and later and later into pregnancy.
  - b. Second-trimester abortions during which the baby begins to feel pain and must be dismantled to fit through the birth canal, occurs 6.2% of the time.
  - c. First-trimester abortions occur 92.7% of the time. The majority of pro-choicers probably fall somewhere in here. We can encourage them to consider this: A 12-week fetus (a term which simply differentiates between a baby in the womb and a baby outside the womb) is only 2 inches long, yet fully formed, with all its systems in place. He or she simply needs to grow and fine tune.
4. If someone throws out the “it’s just a clump of cells” zinger, we can absolutely agree with them! After all, aren’t we all just clumps of masterfully-arranged cells at varying stages of development? At conception, each of us possessed all the genetic material we needed to develop into the person we are right now.
5. The “my body, my choice” mantra continues to rear its fallacious head. We can point out, of course, that the child in the womb is a distinct and unique human being, not a body part, yet we can agree that we should all have the right to control our own bodies. Abortion bans are not in place to force a woman to do something harmful to her body. Quite the opposite. They seek to protect women from the potentially devastating effects that abortion can have on the natural, healthy function of pregnancy—to preserve her health, not compromise it. Celebrate her condition, not alter it.
6. The Right to Reproductive Freedom Initiative would reverse all of Missouri’s current protections for women’s reproductive health. Present pro-life laws allow for miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy care, yet a woman would no longer be able to sue if complications arise, protecting the medical practitioner over the patient. This protection extends to anyone who may have coerced an abortion, yet excludes parental consent because this “infringement upon reproductive rights” would be deemed invalid. How is this good for women (not to mention young girls)?

So now we’ve come full circle back to compassion. Abortion is not the compassionate choice for mom, dad, or baby. It leaves a trail of trauma and tears in its wake. If you would like to be part of the solution, visit [www.mrlwesternregion.org](http://www.mrlwesternregion.org) to see how you can get involved.

