

A rather unusual challenge

EDITORIAL

IT WAS PROBABLY no coincidence that last Monday (Jan. 13) we received an emailed news release from group known as We Need a Law calling for all the candidates to succeed Andrew Scheer as leader of the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) to declare whether they are 'pro-life' or 'pro-choice'.

After all, Monday was the opening day of the 2020 CPC leadership race, when the Leadership Election Organizing Committee (LEOC) also set the rules governing the election, including candidate requirements and fees.

'With this announcement, the Conservative Party's leadership race is officially ready to open, and it's a process designed to test the organizational abilities of our next leader,' said Dan Nowlan, Co-Chair of LEOC. 'It's not only your ability to fundraise, but more importantly your ability to inspire Canadians to join our party, and to do so under tight time lines similar to the pressures of an election.'

As you might suspect, the We Need a Law release authors want Canada to have legislation limiting pregnant women's right to have an abortion.

As matters stand, Canada is one of the few countries in the world which lack such legislation, and the issue is being raised at a time when many U.S. states have passed legislation which bans abortions if there is any sign of a fetus's heartbeat, and some expect the Republican-dominated U.S. Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision which declared abortion bans illegal.

In last October's federal election, the leaders of Canada's two major parties happened to both be Roman Catholics, but Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau and Mr. Scheer clearly had opposing views on this highly controversial subject, Mr. Trudeau's stated view being that all Liberal candidates should respect the right of women to choose to end a pregnancy. While he and Mr. Scheer appeared to agree that Parliament need not return to the issue, Mr. Scheer had been on record as personally anti-abortion.

And while most observers saw the Conservatives' lack of a serious commitment to deal with climate change as the real reason the party failed to win as many seats as the Liberals, some critics of Mr. Scheer have suggested that his failure to come out as 'pro-choice' was just as important.

In the press release, We Need a Law said Canadians 'are watching with a keen eye as candidates for leader of the Conservative Party declare their intentions. This includes pro-life Canadians who want to know what a future leader is willing to do about Canada's complete lack of abortion restrictions.

'Generally, it is assumed that this means pro-life individuals and organizations are scrutinizing each leadership hopeful for whether they are 'pro-life' or 'pro-choice', but some in the pro-life movement see it differently.

It quotes Mike Schouten, Director of We Need a Law, as saying Pro-life Conservatives 'should be less concerned about whether a future leader thinks like them and more concerned about whether he or she realizes that pro-life conservatives make up an integral part of the party's base.'

Noting that the pro-life movement was instrumental in Mr. Scheer's successful leadership bid, and has the potential to play a large part in the upcoming race, the release said a successful candidate 'needs support from the pro-life movement. Pulling out tired lines like 'not re-opening the debate' or claiming that abortion is a 'settled issue' in Canada could be detrimental to a leadership campaign.'

Would it be? We wonder.

As matters stand, we suspect that while few Canadians are ?pro-abortion?, ever fewer would like to see a return to criminalization of the procedure.

However, the issue continues to be clouded by several factors that could and should be dealt with by legislation.

One is a dearth of information on the extent to which lack of any laws has led to an increase in the number of abortions, given the countering effect of medicines that effectively terminate a pregnancy.

Another is the uneven access to both abortions and anti-pregnancy meds, with some provinces having few hospitals or doctors willing to perform abortions or prescribe the medications.

Perhaps in the circumstances what we really need is more active promotion of child-bearing, rather than restriction of women's choices.