

A slippery slope on 'personhood' rights

I have never seen or heard any woman, real or fictionalized, not consider her unborn child a person. Even when it's other

Mariam Williams



things — a new and exciting chapter in a happy relationship, an accident, a miracle, a reason to drop out of school, the only reason to stay married,

a guarantee of love, a step off the tenure/law partner/CEO track, an expense, a complication to a chronic illness, the beginning of the next generation, a blessing, motivation to get healthy, a catalyst for growing up and becoming more responsible, a reason to get a college de-

gree—you'd be hard-pressed to find any woman holding a positive pregnancy test say, "I have a zygote!"

Hence, I'm not opposed to referring to an unborn child as a person. That is, in casual conversation. Defining an unborn child as a person according to the law, however, is another matter.

On Tuesday, voters in Mississippi will decide on a constitutional amendment to define a fertilized egg as a human being. Amendment 26 would ban all abortions and could ban IUDs and other forms of birth control. There is no language in the measure for exceptions in cases of rape, incest, fetal abnormalities or ectopic pregnancies and other cases in which terminating the pregnancy is the only way to save the moth-

er's life.

Nor are there exceptions for situations that probably would result in involuntary manslaughter charges for a child outside of the womb, as in, if a woman who is three months pregnant texts while driving, has a bad car accident and she survives but the baby doesn't. If a man were texting while driving and killed a 1-day-old baby in another car, wouldn't he be prosecuted or at least sued in civil court for wrongful death?

What if she's texting while walking and has a bad fall? Or she has the rare job that's physically intense and she overdoes it one day? What if she overdoes it before she knows she's pregnant and this causes a miscarriage? Let's say a woman, not knowing she's pregnant, breaks a

bone, has to get an X-ray and the radiation results in birth defects. Did the doctor commit assault?

A pregnant woman could have bad habits that are legal, bad habits she doesn't stop during pregnancy. What if she smokes and has a baby with a low birth weight or just doesn't take good care of herself in general and doesn't get sufficient prenatal care? If her unborn child is a person, and that person has the same rights as any child who already exists outside of the womb, isn't that child abuse or neglect?

If not, then why not?

During radio interviews last week, proponents of the personhood movement found such questions outlandish, but if they're going to declare that a being not old enough to have a heart has every right that an

adult has, they have to acknowledge all the many ways a person can meet death or injury and be willing to hold those involved responsible.

The proponents' unwillingness to do so makes it unsurprisingly clear they're not concerned about age discrimination, as the PersonhoodUSA website claims. They want everyone to equate abortion with murder and to stop women from ever again enlisting their doctors as hired hit men.

As if decisions that affect a woman's health, well-being, finances, career, time and family for the rest of her and likely her sexual partner's life, weren't serious enough without criminalization.

Whether it occurs when planned or disrupts a life otherwise going well, preg-

nancy is a life-changing event. It's also a private one. A government that would prosecute women for not having children is just as intrusive as a government that would enforce a one-child rule. It would be dictatorial rule that strips away choice for everyone, further limits options for poor women and families and makes it a crime for them to take charge of very serious decisions that affect their daily lives and their futures. And it doesn't belong in a democracy in Mississippi or in any of the other 49 states where Personhood USA has petitions in the works.

Mariam Williams is a writer who lives in Louisville. More of her writing can be found at RedboneAfropuff.com.