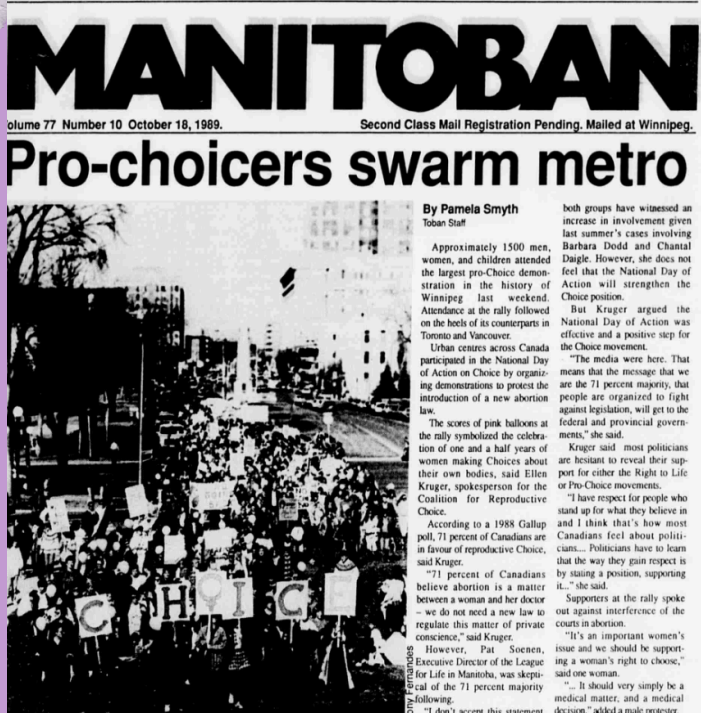


My Body, My Choice, Our Struggle

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The news story on the left from “The Manitoban” captures downtown Winnipeg in 1989, while the article below refers to a protest at the University of Manitoba campus in 2023.

According to the 1989 article, 71% of Canadians supported reproductive freedom. Today, that number has risen to 80% supporting the right to choose.

If support for reproductive freedom is so strong, why does it feel like people today are still fighting the same battles as the protesters of 1989?

Following major victories in the recognition of certain reproductive rights, access to and the realization of these rights remains uneven across our province. It is crucial that we continue to strengthen access to reproductive justice for all and work to withstand threats to our rights.

Furthermore, our community networks are increasingly eroded by the mounting pressures of capitalism and the deliberate spread of misinformation and oppressive rhetoric designed to fuel uncertainty.

Many of the challenges of the past are resurfacing in new and complex ways, but we must remember that hope and progress remain possible. By staying connected and working in solidarity, we can sustain our motivation and continue pushing for meaningful change.

Student groups hold pro-choice initiative

Event comes as a response to anti-abortion group presence on campus

Alicia Rose, staff

IN RESPONSE TO ANTI-ABORTION groups on campus, the Women's Centre at the University of Manitoba, alongside Justice for Women Manitoba and the Arts Student Body Council, held an alternative “pro-choice initiative.” On March 29, the Women's Centre took to Instagram to inform students of its initiative and to clarify that it would not be a counter-protest, citing “negative experiences in the past” as one reason why. “We feel that it is too big of a risk for our students' mental health,” the Instagram post read. This marks a change from the centre's counter-protest in the fall, where its members and supporters gathered across from the anti-abortion group. UMSU women's representative Christine Yasay explained that at the fall counter-protest, those who opposed the right to choose would come to debate about the matter,

and that counter-protesters “essentially had to debate why we should have rights, which is a very uncomfortable and emotionally tolling thing to do.” “I didn't want to do that again,” she said. “I felt like it put the mental health of our students at risk.” To provide support to students, the Women's Centre was open on Wednesday from 1 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and on Friday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Yasay said that holding the initiative at the Women's Centre was a way to demonstrate that “there is a presence on campus that is here for you and does support your right to choose whatever it is that is best for your body.” During this time, the Women's Centre provided resources to students, as well as material for students to use to write their own messages and statements about their bodily autonomy and the right to choose.

Yasay said she hopes the Women's Centre can work alongside the U of M administration to ensure that misinformation regarding abortion is not being spread on campus. At present, signs displayed on campus state that the group protesting abortion is allowed on university grounds in the name of “the free exchange of ideas, freedom of expression and academic freedom.” “I'm not quite sure what will happen next, but I do think it's really important that the mental health and the well-being of our students are put first,” Yasay said. Cléche Kokolo, vice-president of external affairs for the Women's Centre, said that the initiative came about by listening to the community's concerns and seeing the need for a safe space where community members could receive support. She said that the centre “really went further” than other initiatives. “We extended the different

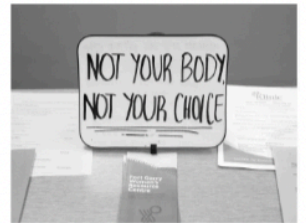


photo / Ebanolawa Akiribo / staff

safe space, we partnered up with different organizations, we extended the Women's Centre hours to really make ourselves accessible to the community during this week of protest,” she said. Compared to the fall counter-protest, Kokolo said that the focus of this effort was to ensure that students who may be affected by the protests “had a place to go.” “It was just an approach that allowed people to do what they felt [was] best for them,” she said. news@themanitoban.com

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