

OPINIONS

Surrogacy exposed

By **Kathleen Parker**, Published: MAY 24, 8:47 PM ET

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Women's reproductive rights have enjoyed a half-century or so of well-defined proponents and opponents, but the recently flourishing fertility industry, from egg harvesting to surrogacy, has produced fresh and surprising alliances among former foes.

Feminists, traditionalists, Catholics, evangelicals, ethicists and atheists alike have united to combat what many convincingly view as the exploitation and commodification of women and the violation of human rights even as perfect babies and happy families are formed.

Speaking of quagmires.

Latest to the arena is Louisiana, where **a pro-surrogacy bill** creating a regulatory structure for surrogate parenting passed both legislative houses with few dissenting votes and now faces a possible veto by Gov. Bobby Jindal (R). A thumbs-down from Jindal would constitute an act of principled courage, given widespread public support and lobbying efforts that have included the prominent display of two beautiful, surrogate-produced children born of the bill's chief author, state **Sen. Gary Smith**.



GALLERY

Ann Telnaes on reproductive rights: The Post cartoonist collects her cartoons on the topic.

During his push for the bill, Smith brought his children to the statehouse and circulated photographs of the two.

Whatever one may feel about Smith's happy family, "feel" being the operative term, one should also be aware that not all surrogacy stories are so pretty. There is a dark underbelly to the surrogacy industry — and it is a business — including a burgeoning industry that preys on vulnerable women, commodifying them as "ovens," **a term Smith himself used**. Never mind repercussions for the children themselves, who may have as many as five "parents," from the egg and sperm donors, to the woman who carries them to the couple or single parent who adopts them.

It isn't necessary to demonize anyone here. It is only fair to assume that people who want a child this much are good people with the wherewithal to make dreams come true. The women who carry others' babies to term may be acting out of a sense of service or altruism, but the financial incentive can't be ignored. Surrogacy brokers are wise to their marketplace and specifically target populations that are likely to be attracted to surrogacy. Almost half the surrogates in this country are military wives, according to **Kathy Sloan**, a National Organization for Women board member and surrogacy

opponent.

Though laws, where they exist, vary from state to state, advertising in military periodicals and elsewhere lists requirements that the woman must already be a mom and thus know the ropes, as well as be a proven breeder. She must be willing to stay in place until the baby is born and, of course, surrender rights to the child. Although the woman is paid between \$25,000 and \$50,000 for her surrogacy, the language of most legislation speaks only to “living expenses” and coverage of medical bills. Most allow for termination of pregnancy should some abnormality be discovered pre-term.

In one such case in Connecticut where a fetus was shown to have abnormalities, the surrogate was offered \$10,000 to abort. She declined. Because state law clearly identified the “purchasers” as the parents, the surrogate moved to another state, had the baby and placed her in an adoptive home.

The simplicity of the human desire for children notwithstanding, there’s nothing simple about the surrogacy business — and we haven’t scraped the surface of the metaphysical, spiritual, emotional and psychological issues with which a brief flirtation evokes mind-twisting complexities. Physical concerns, meanwhile, are plentiful.

This obviously is rich territory for pro-life crusaders for whom compromise on embryos is impossible, but NOW’s Sloan, a pro-choice activist, shares no such concerns. She sees surrogacy only as the exploitation of vulnerable women. She also sees a variety of class and race issues at play. The rich take advantage of the poor for designer babies, Caucasian features for carrier preferred.

The United States is second only to **India** in providing surrogates, according to Sloan, who also works with the United Nations on human rights. But even India, where some women are warehoused for nine months and forbidden to leave during the pregnancy, recently has set **limits on surrogacy**. Here in America, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie (R) recently **vetoed a bill similar** to Louisiana’s upon learning the darker details behind the family portraits.

While no one wishes to cause pain to people who, for whatever reason, can’t have a child on their own, there are more compelling principles and consequences in play. Human babies are not things; their mothers are not ovens. But bartering and selling babies-to-order sure make them seem that way. By turning the miracle of life into a profit-driven, state-regulated industry, the stork begins to resemble a vulture.

Read more from [Kathleen Parker’s archive](#), [follow her on Twitter](#) or [find her on Facebook](#).

COMMENTS



Davis_CD wrote:
May 28, 2013 at 4:41 PM

Clearly this author knows nothing about surrogacy and I don't believe all these groups said to "have united to combat what many convincingly view as the exploitation and commodification of women..." As a surrogate myself, 99 of every 100 people I come in contact with, Christian, Atheist, Feminist... had and have nothing but praise and blessings to bestow upon me, the parents of the child I carried and the child. Surrogacy is a beautiful and powerful thing, the most rewarding endeavor I have every taken part in, aside from rearing my own children. It was a gift to me that the parents of the baby I carried were able to support me while I was carrying their child but there is nothing that can compare to watching the joy of a beautiful family that wouldn't have been possible without me. Also, I like many surrogates enjoy pregnancy and birth. It is an empowering thing to me. Surrogacy was the greatest gift I have ever given and the greatest gift I have ever received. Funny, this article could have gone the other direction... "surrogates exploit infertile and gay couples." I'll bet 99% of surrogates and intended parents will tell you the agreement and endeavor of surrogacy

was equally beneficial and rewarding. <3



bpieraccini wrote:
May 28, 2013 at 3:41 PM

As a new father who has just had a baby through surrogacy, I find Kathleen Parker completely uninformed about the process of surrogacy. Most reputable agencies in the United States have thorough screening processes that filter out women who may not be appropriate to be a surrogate (for whatever reason). Medical and psychological exams are required and paid for by the intended parents. Women volunteer for this service, and are compensated for it. Our surrogate wanted to be a surrogate because she is a stay-at-home mom and wanted to provide for her family, but she also wanted to give the joy and love she has experienced through childrearing to other loving to-be parents. Yes, it is a business with many C.Y.A. processes, but when the baby is born, the business is over, and the baby has a loving family that has gone through a lengthy process to have them. IVF children are born to parents who want them and love them.



yourhumanrights wrote:
May 28, 2013 at 11:07 AM

No mention of what these huge amounts of cancer causing steroids injected into these women do to them long term. Typical for the pro aborts. Meanwhile, our female breast cancer incidence rate has TRIPLED. Lance Armstrong and Barry Bonds must be very jealous..

<http://handsoffourovaries.com/manifesto.htm>

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