My husband and I are ordinary, rural Iowa folks. My husband works hard on our farm and I have a career in social work. We met and married later in life, but we were anxious to start a family. We welcomed a healthy baby boy into our family after 2 years of marriage. We were ready to have one more child and we were delighted when we became pregnant again a couple of years later. By this time I was 36 years old. Due to my age we were offered prenatal testing. Prior to the testing we asked ourselves that question that no one wants to answer. “What would we do if the tests revealed problems?” We decided to take it a step at a time and that having more information was better than not having any.

The initial tests came back abnormal. We were sent to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN for further testing. I knew the minute I saw the face of the ultrasound tech that something was very wrong. She kept taking measurements and when we questioned her, she said she would have the Dr. come in and speak with us. When the Dr. came in he was grim. He told us it appeared that the baby had a Neural Tube Defect, Spina Bifida. He said the baby’s brain was very misshapen and large, indicating hydrocephaly. Because the shape and size of the brain, it was likely that there was brain damage and there would be cognitive issues. It would also require surgery immediately after birth to place a shunt in the brain to relieve the pressure of the fluid. Then there were the physical problems. The opening on the spine and the clubbed feet indicated that the baby probably would not walk, never have control of their bowl and bladder, and would require multiple surgeries over the next several weeks and years to address all the physical issues. Our worst fears were realized and we were devastated. We just received the most tragic news and information. Now what do we do with it?

The next several hours were a blur of meetings with neonatologists, genetic doctors, and other medical personnel to give us information, answer our questions, and console two very emotional parents who just learned the most heartbreaking news. In between appointments, my husband and I either sat in numbed silence or held each other and sobbed.

I’ll never forget the ride home that day. About 10 miles out of Rochester, my husband burst into tears and had to pull our car to the side of the road. It was just too much. We spent the next several days in a haze of grief and sadness. We talked with our local doctor who delivered our son, we talked with friends and family, and we talked with our Pastor. But never once did occur to me to talk with my legislator.

My husband and I weighed the future. We lived in a small, 150 year old farm house. We lived in rural Iowa, nearly 2 hours away from any specialized medical services. We had a young son who needed our attention. What kind of a life would this child have? One filled with medical procedures and pain? One where they were unaware of their surroundings and unable to interact with their family? What kind of life would our family have? One where we were separated much of the time due to ongoing medical treatment so far from home? And how would we manage the expenses? It soon became clear to us that we could not subject this baby and our family to that kind of pain and turmoil. We decided to terminate the pregnancy. It was not a decision we came to lightly. But it was OUR decision. Never once did it occur to me that my legislator would make themselves a part of that decision. Never once did I wonder if I was doing something unlawful. This is my body, my family.

I would never negatively judge another family for making a different decision. I would offer help and support as they navigated their difficult journey. I expect the same consideration.

Since then, I have become outraged and militant in my opposition to anyone trying to take away the rights of women in making these decisions. How dare anyone in the legislature believe they can supplant their judgement for mine and my Doctor. Who gives you that right? You are not God. I prayed to God during that time and since. I’ll take my chances with Him, not you.