

Idaho governor halts bill limiting abortions

BOISE, Idaho (CNS) — Gov. Cecil Andrus of Idaho, who previously declared himself pro-life, March 30 vetoed the strongest anti-abortion bill passed by any state legislature.

He called the bill "bad legislation."

Bishop Tod D. Brown of Boise said he was "saddened" that the governor, "a long-time supporter and protector" of unborn life, had vetoed the bill.

Father Dennis Day, pro-life director for the Boise diocese, said Andrus "never heard the pro-life case," adding that the governor "refused to take a call that was set up for him from Mother Teresa" the day of the veto.

Dr. John Willke, president of the National Right to Life Committee, which has headquarters in Washington, said Andrus "abandoned thousands of unborn children who will continue to die needlessly in Idaho."

Saying he read the governor's veto message, Vincentian Father John M. Gouldrick, director of the U.S. bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities in Washington, said he found no indication Andrus considered the unborn child, which he called a "glaring" omission.

Idaho's Legislature adjourned earlier March 30 so there was no chance for an override of the veto, although the margins of passage in each house were short of the necessary two-thirds majorities.

Some 2,000 abortion rights supporters gathered March 31 on the State Capitol steps to hail the governor's veto.

Andrus denied that threats of economic pressure on his state swayed his decision.

Molly Yard, president of the National Organization for Women, who had called for a boycott of Idaho potatoes, called the veto "surprising but welcome news" for American women.

Kerry Uhlenkott, legislative coordinator for Right to Life of Idaho, said she felt "totally betrayed" by Andrus. "He ignored the majority of Idahoans," she said.

The National Right to Life Committee said a February poll done by the firm of Tarrance & Associates had found that 67 percent of Idaho residents opposed abortion for birth control purposes, which would have been prohibited under the legislation.

Because of his veto, National Right to Life will target Andrus, a Democrat seeking re-election, for defeat in November, one source said.

Andrus, in his veto message, said the bill "satisfies neither" his own views nor the needs of his state.

He said the bill was so narrowly written that "it would punitively and without compassion" bar women pregnant from rape or incest from having abortions in Idaho.

Under the bill, a rape would have had to be reported to authorities within seven days for an abortion to be legal. In the case of incest, the victim would have had to be under age 18.

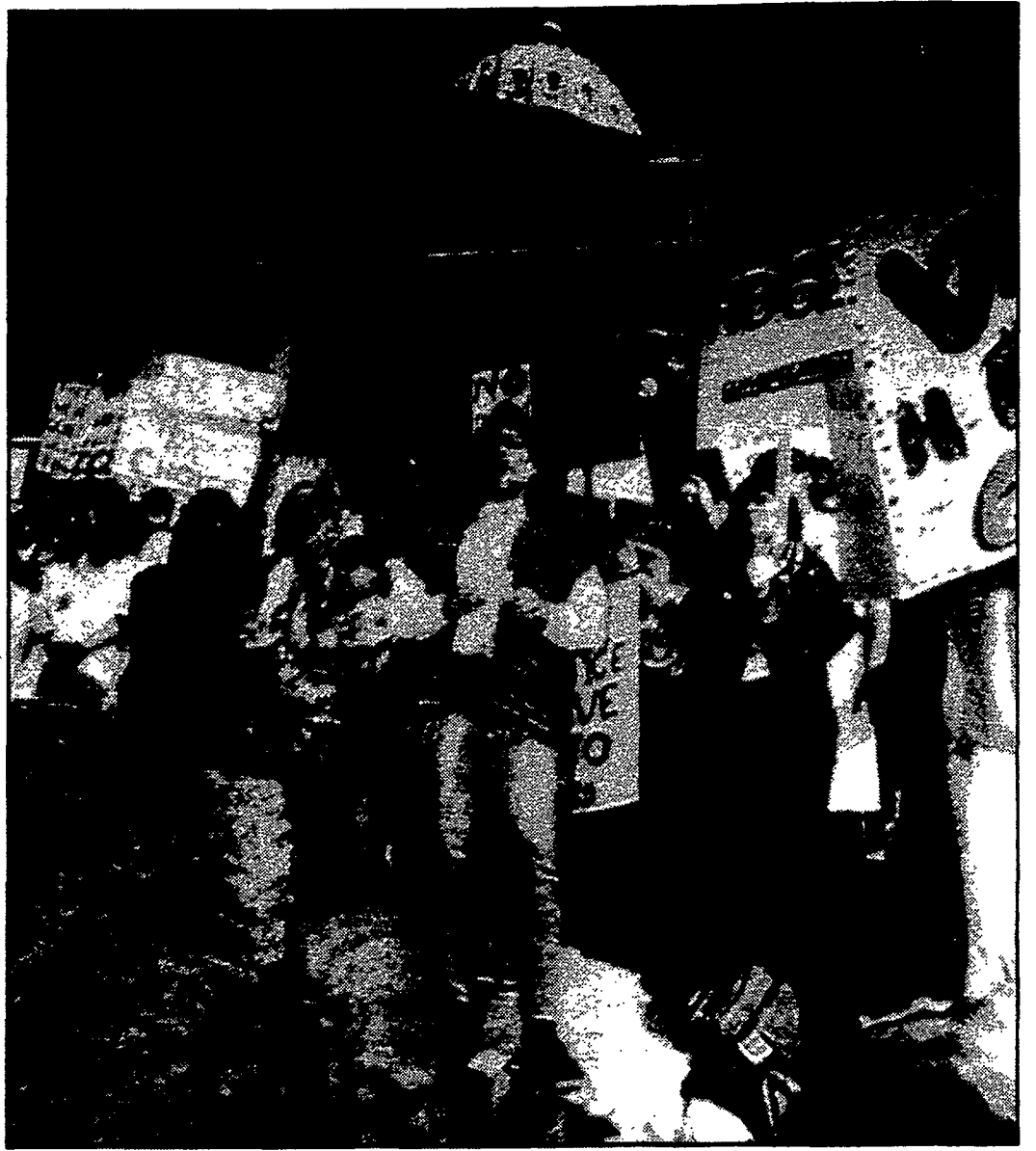
Abortion would have been illegal in cases of statutory rape and of sex with minors on the presumption that the female gives consent in such instances.

In cases of profound fetal deformity or where the mother's life was endangered, abortion would have been permitted.

A physician performing an illegal abortion could have been fined at least \$10,000 as a civil penalty.

Andrus said he had been told by the medical community of doubts whether any doctor in Idaho would have performed abortions "because of the legal liability restrictions" on doctors in the bill.

Backers of the legislation claimed that the bill, had it become law, would have



AP/Wide World Photos
Pro-choice forces dumped more than 10,000 potatoes on the steps of the Idaho Capitol Thursday, March 29, as a symbol of their threatened boycott.

prevented some 95 percent of all abortions in Idaho.

The National Right to Life Committee, which had helped write the legislation, wanted to use it to test *Roe vs. Wade*, the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that made abortion a matter of constitutional right.

Some perceived the bill, as written, would meet objections attributed to Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, considered the high court's swing vote against abortion.

The governor said even the sponsors said the bill was drafted to elicit a Supreme Court test.

Andrus said he was confident Idahoans "can make our own decisions ... without

outside pressure, outside influence and threats."

Bishop Brown said that despite his disappointment "I am pleased that Gov. Andrus, in keeping with his pro-life stance, said he is willing to return to the Idaho Legislature next year with pro-life legislation that can address his concerns."

"Only a period of respectful and reasonable dialogue holds the promise of reaching some consensus on this issue of protecting the lives of the unborn," the bishop said.

He called on Catholics to "intensify their prayers and penitential practices" to resolve the moral and ethical question of

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