

WORLD & NATION

Abortion coalition head admits lie

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The executive director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers has admitted that he and other supporters of keeping abortion legal lied about the partial-birth abortion procedure during debate over legislation to ban it.

Ron Fitzsimmons, whose organization represents more than 200 independently owned abortion clinics, said in an interview in the March 3 *American Medical News* that abortion supporters used "half-truths" in the debate that ultimately led Congress to fail to override President Clinton's veto of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act.

Fitzsimmons said he lied when he said in a November 1995 interview on "Nightline" that women have partial-birth abortions only in cases of danger to the mother's life or severe fetal abnormalities.

"It was not a shining moment for me personally," said Fitzsimmons, who said he stayed out of the debate after that.

The legislation vetoed by Clinton would have banned a procedure used in late-term abortions in which the unborn child is partially delivered, feet first, before surgical scissors are stabbed into the base of the infant's head. The child's brain is then removed by suction, allowing for easier delivery of the collapsed head.

Fitzsimmons told the *American Medical News*, published by the American Medical Association, that the vast majority of partial-birth abortions are performed in the second trimester on healthy fetuses and healthy mothers.

"The abortion rights folks know it, the anti-abortion folks know it, and so, probably, does everyone else," he said.

Suzanne Schnittman, consistent life ethic coordinator for the Diocese of Rochester, noted that opponents of partial-birth abortion had long pointed out that the facts were on their side.

"I find it most disheartening that so many people are so ready to believe a lie about partial-birth abortion from pro-

choice authorities when the truth was supplied by many doctors about those lies," she said. "It's unfortunate the truth did not get out when we needed it."

Schnittman added that Fitzsimmons' confession may change the terms of the partial-birth abortion debate.

"Does this mean we'll get another chance to ban what is close to infanticide?" she asked rhetorically.

When the debate began over the partial-birth abortion procedure, Fitzsimmons said, "I learned right away that this was being done for the most part in cases that did not involve those extreme circumstances" cited by opponents of the ban.

He also said he thought a ban on partial-birth abortions "wasn't worth going to the mat on" because it would have little effect on doctors or patients. "The real world impact on doctors and patients is virtually nil," he said, adding that doctors would just use another abortion method.

The biggest problem arising from the debate over partial-birth abortion has been a loss of credibility for those who want to keep abortion legal, Fitzsimmons said.

"The pro-choice movement has lost a lot of credibility during this debate, not just with the general public, but with our pro-choice friends in Congress," he said. "Even the White House is now questioning the accuracy of some of the information given to it on this issue."

"We're fighting a bill that has the support of, what, 78 percent of the public?" Fitzsimmons added. "That tells me that we have a PR problem."

He said the abortion supporters "did serious harm" to those who perform partial-birth abortions by lying that they were only performed in extreme circumstances.

"When you're a doctor who does these abortions and the leaders of your movement appear before Congress and go on network news and say these procedures are done in only the most tragic of circumstances, how do you think it makes them

feel?" he said. "You know they're primarily done on healthy women and healthy fetuses, and it makes you feel like a dirty little abortionist with a dirty little secret."

If the legislation is reintroduced in Congress, "I think we should tell them the truth, let them vote and move on," he said.

Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., chairman of the House Pro-Life Caucus, said Fitzsimmons' comments showed that "even those who have defended this method of child abuse eventually have their consciences catch up to them."

"Partial-birth abortion is child abuse. It is murder. It is infanticide," he added. "And now it's clear to even those who call themselves 'pro-choice' that partial-birth abortion is grotesquely inhumane."

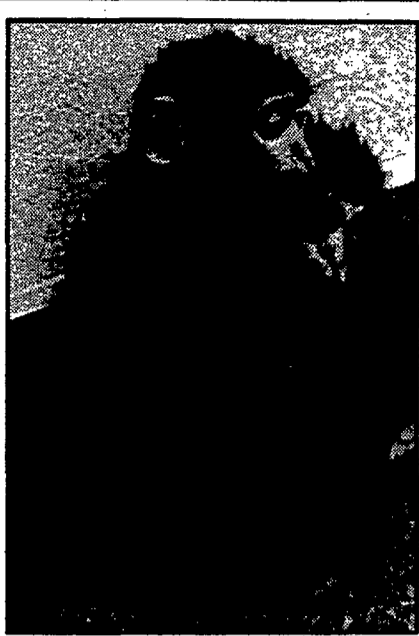
A separate article in the same issue of *American Medical News* reported on reaction to an opinion issued in January by the executive board of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists on partial-birth abortion.

The board said that it could identify "no circumstances under which this procedure would be the only option to save the life of the mother or preserve the health of the woman."

However, it said the procedure "may be the best or most appropriate procedure in a particular circumstance to save the life or preserve the health of a woman, and only the doctor, in consultation with the patient, based upon the woman's particular circumstances, can make this decision."

In a letter to the medical group, the Physicians Ad Hoc Coalition for Truth — a group of about 400 doctors who oppose partial-birth abortions — said the board's statement "clearly does not represent a consensus among the nation's obstetricians and gynecologists as to the safety or appropriateness, under any circumstances, of partial-birth abortion."

This article contains additional reporting by Rob Cullivan.



CNS/Reuters

Shy clones

A startling announcement came March 2 of two cloned monkeys born in Oregon last August. The news came shortly after reports about a cloned sheep born in Scotland. In his Angelus address March 2, Pope John Paul II alluded to cloning, saying that such "dangerous experiments" show a lack of respect for life.

Legionaries leader denies allegations of sexual abuse

HARTFORD, Conn. — The founder and head of the Legionaries of Christ has categorically denied recently published allegations that he sexually abused several former Legionaries when they were teenage seminarians in the 1940s, '50s and '60s. "In all cases they (the accusations) are defamations and falsities with no foundation whatsoever," Father Marcial Maciel Degollado wrote in a Feb. 28 letter to *The Hartford Courant* daily newspaper, which reported the allegations as its lead story Feb. 23.

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