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'MEDICAL ABORTION'

University criticized for pushing method

Mary Melfi calls herself a "Catholic for life."

Melfi, who attends St. James Church, Irondequoit, was one of several protesters who held signs on Crittenden Street across from the University of Rochester's Strong Medical Center on Dec. 12, signs emblazoned with such slogans as "U of R Health Care kills babies."

As cold winds enveloped the pro-life protesters, Melfi answered a question about why she was out demonstrating against a university-sponsored conference taking place Dec. 12-13. The conference was designed to teach primary care physicians how to use certain drugs to induce abortions early in pregnancies.

"What brings me out here is being a voice for the voiceless, a defense for the defenseless," she said, referring to the unborn.

Promoters of the drug-induced abortion technique tout it as a way for women to abort in the privacy of their homes, away from the eyes of the pro-life protesters like Melfi who are sometimes found at clinics where surgical abortions are performed.

One such medical abortion promoter is Larry Lader, president of the national group Abortion Rights Mobilization. He gave the keynote speech at the Strong conference the afternoon of Dec. 12. Lader predicted that by the middle of next year, every woman in the United States would be within "reasonable driving distance" of a physician's office where she could get pills to induce abortion.

"(I)'ll be very tough for the other side to picket every doctor," he said.

Longtime pro-life activist Bob Dorscheid agreed with Lader. A parishioner at Holy Spirit Church in Penfield, Dorscheid is a member of the Pro-Life Planning Committee, a Monroe County group. He noted that it will be hard for pro-life activists to stem the availability of medical abortion.

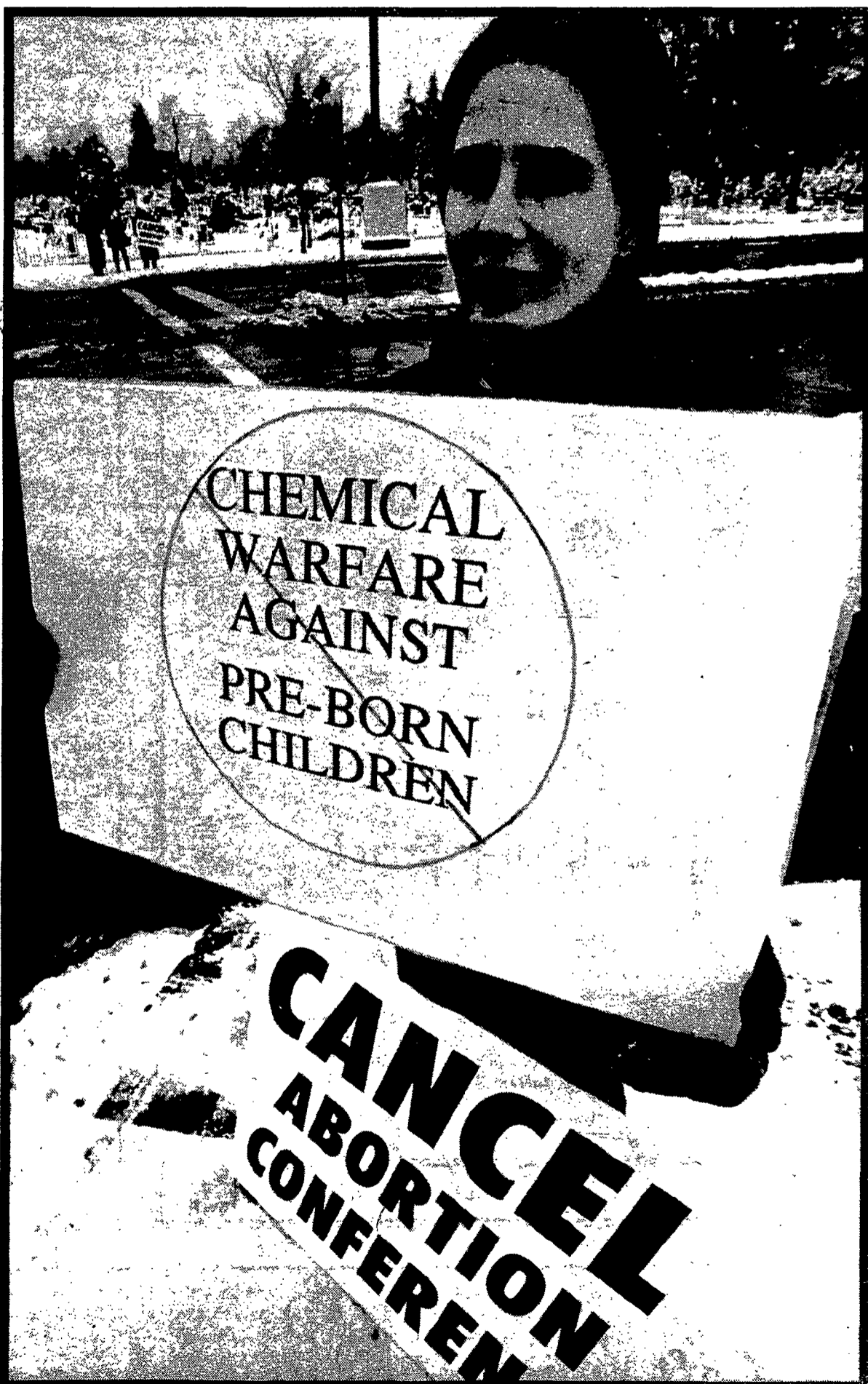
"I don't know if we're going to be able to combat it, other than reaching out to women going through a difficult pregnancy," he said.

Brief life in the womb

Medical abortions — sometimes called chemical abortions — take place early in a pregnancy through the use of such drugs as mifepristone (commonly known as RU-486), methotrexate and misoprostol. The University of Rochester is home to two nationally known physician-professors, Dr. Eric Schaff and Dr. Steven Eisinger, who have extensively researched medical abortions, and both men spoke at the Dec. 12-13 conference. Lader's group, Abortion Rights Mobilization, has sponsored medical abortion trials at the university.

According to information from the conference organizers, medical abortions use various combinations of drugs like methotrexate, misoprostol and mifepristone to end

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Greg Francis/Staff photographer

STORY BY ROB CULLIVAN

Joanne Faccl of St. Rita's Church, Webster, a member of Feminists for Life, stands in protest of chemical abortion speakers at Strong Memorial Hospital, Rochester, Dec. 12.