

Senate OKs partial-birth abortion ban

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Catholic officials praised the U.S. Senate for its 64-33 vote to pass the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban March 13.

"This historic vote sets the ban on track to be the first federal law limiting abortion" since the 1973 Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion, said Cathy Cleaver, director of planning and information for the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities.

The bill, introduced by Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., passed after three days of intense debate. It prohibits doctors from committing an "overt act" designed to kill a partially delivered fetus and includes an exemption in cases where the procedure is necessary to save the life of the mother.

Opponents of the legislation, including Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., called the bill's language unconstitutional. Boxer described it as "an attempt to outlaw all abortions, to take away the rights of women to choose — not only to chip away at that right, but to take it away, and, by the way, criminalize abortions."

In a statement released after the vote, President Bush called the Senate's action "an important step to building a culture of life in America" and said he looked forward to the House passing legislation and working with the Senate to resolve any differences "so that I can sign legislation banning partial-birth abortion into law."

Cleaver said she expected the House to pass the ban quickly, and she described the Senate vote as "the beginning of the end for this cruel and dangerous procedure."

Carl Anderson, supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus, likewise said he "looked forward to passage of similar legislation in the House."

"We still have a long way to go toward building what John Paul II has called the culture of life," Anderson said, but he added that "banning partial-birth abortion is a good and necessary first step."

Barbara Garavalia, president of



Nancy Wiechec/CNS

Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., joins a prayer vigil for life Jan. 21 at the Basilica of the National Shrine in Washington. He has led efforts to ban partial-birth abortion.

the National Council of Catholic Women, similarly urged Congress to "move quickly toward sending this bill to the president's desk so that the history of partial-birth abortion in America will be short-lived, a reflection of the strong and widespread opposition by America to this inhumane procedure."

Cardinal Anthony J. Bevilacqua of Philadelphia, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, earlier had urged the Senate to approve the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003 without amendments to weaken it.

In a March 10 letter to senators, he

asked them to support the measure over a substitute proposal that was expected to be introduced. The Senate began floor debate on the bill March 10.

Similar bills have been approved by Congress twice before but were vetoed by President Clinton. A version passed by the House last year was never scheduled for consideration in the Senate, which was then controlled by Democrats.

More than half the states have enacted laws banning the procedure, and polls "consistently show" that a majority of Americans oppose it, the cardinal wrote in his letter. But in 2000 the Supreme Court struck down Nebraska's partial-birth abortion ban, raising questions about the constitutionality of other state prohibitions, the cardinal noted.

Cardinal Bevilacqua said the new measure "responds to this question of constitutionality." First, the bill narrowly defines partial-birth abortion and addresses issues raised by the Supreme Court about protecting women's health, he said.

The bill also "presents Congress' findings, based on years of testimony, that partial-birth abortion is not necessary to preserve women's

health, and in fact may pose serious health risks," the cardinal added.

Opponents of the legislation argued that the particular type of abortion it addresses is sometimes medically necessary, especially when birth defects or other complications are discovered late in a pregnancy and other abortion methods are less likely to succeed.

On the Senate floor March 10, Santorum said partial-birth abortions are "never medically necessary," are "not taught in any medical school in this country" and are "not recommended." In describing the procedure, he said it is being used after the 20th week of pregnancy, and during it the fetus is partially delivered, then a pair of scissors is "thrust into the base of the skull and ... the cranial contents removed."

"Partial-birth abortion promises nothing but pain, for everyone involved," said Cleaver in her March 13 statement.

She called the Senate vote a "great success for those who have worked so hard for passage of this bill, but above all it is a victory for women and children, who bear the pain and anguish wrought by this inhumane procedure."



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<p>Thursday, April 3 @ 7:30 PM St. John Fisher College #135 Basil Hall Parking Lots A or B 3690 East Ave., Rochester, NY Reception following</p>	<p>Friday, April 4 @ 2:00 PM University of Rochester *TBD Intervarsity Christian Fellowship Parking Lot: *TBD River Road Campus, Rochester, NY</p>	<p>Saturday, April 5 @ 9:00 AM Community Center St. Anne Church 1600 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester, NY Light refreshments</p>
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For schedule updates and presentation information, call *(585) 266-2266.
Free and open to the public. Free will offering will be taken.

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