

SENATE URGED TO SEND BILL TO BUSH

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities urged senators to move the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act on to President Bush by eliminating what he called an "extraneous" provision.

Cardinal Anthony J. Bevilacqua said the provision added as an amendment to the bill was "the one remaining obstacle to enactment."

Proposed by Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, the amendment states that the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision "was appropriate and secures an important constitutional right" and "should not be overturned."

VATICAN EYES U.N.

CLONING DEBATE

NEW YORK (CNS) — The Vatican is engaged in a major effort to influence a debate on human cloning scheduled to take place during this fall's meeting of the U.N. General Assembly.

A U.N. working group exploring proposals to write an international convention on cloning will meet Sept. 29-Oct. 3, and possibly seek General Assembly authorization to move ahead with drafting a convention or some other legal instrument.

Most governments favor a ban on reproductive cloning, but the key issue is whether international law should go further to rule out all forms of human cloning.

OFFICIALS DISPLEASED WITH WTO MEETING

MEXICO CITY (CNS) — Church officials and Catholic groups said the collapse of international trade talks amid a rift between rich and poor countries was a "lost opportunity."

The World Trade Organization's fifth ministerial conference, held in Cancun, Mexico, ended Sept. 14 without any agreement. Developed nations refused to make substantial reductions in agricultural subsidies, and developing nations refused to accept new rules on foreign investment. Farmers in poor countries said they cannot compete with food imports from the United States and European Union, where governments give producers billions of dollars in subsidies each year.

Boston settlement reached

Jerry Filteau/CNS

WASHINGTON — Less than six weeks after becoming head of the Boston Archdiocese, Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley has reached the largest financial settlement in U.S. church history with hundreds of victims of sexual abuse by Boston priests.

"This is an important agreement. ... I hope that all the victims will choose to participate," said Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The settlement — for up to \$85 million covering 552 lawsuits — came at the end of several days of intense negotiations in Boston between lawyers for both sides under a mediator, including a long evening session Sept. 7, in which the archbishop personally participated.

Plaintiffs' attorneys said the credibility of Archbishop O'Malley, who said the \$85 million offer "maxed out" the archdiocese's financial resources, played a major role in bringing the parties to an agreement.

Archbishop O'Malley, who was attending a meeting of the USCCB Administrative Committee in Washington when the agreement was finalized, told his archdiocesan newspaper, *The Pilot*, in a telephone interview that he felt he needed to get involved to reach a speedy settlement.

"It became evident that it was necessary for the archbishop to be personally involved in the conversations ... because at times your counsel can speak for you, but at other times people want to know a direct answer from the archdiocese," he said. "So it became evident, in order to expedite the process, it would be important for me to be involved in the dialogue."

The Boston settlement surpassed the \$31 million that victims of ex-priest Rudy Kos received from the Dallas Diocese in 1998 and the \$25.7 million the Archdiocese of Louisville recently agreed to pay to settle 243 lawsuits.

Father Christopher J. Coyne, Boston archdiocesan spokesman, said part of the funds for the settlement will come from selling surplus real estate and the archdiocese will seek to recuperate part of it from insurance carriers. He said he did not know how the archdiocese, already in debt from previous settlements, would come up with the remainder.

The archdiocese agreed to provide the entire amount before the end of the year.

"Our actions say we admit our



Reuters/CNS

Gary Bergeron clutches a copy of the \$85 million settlement between 552 alleged victims of clergy sexual abuse and the Archdiocese of Boston as he and other victims leave the Suffolk Superior Court in Boston Sept. 9. His lawyer, Robert Sherman, is at left. The agreement is the largest financial settlement in U.S. church history.

mistakes, we've learned from our mistakes," Father Coyne said. He said the archdiocese will do "everything humanly possible to make sure that this never occurs again."

"Obviously there is much more that needs to be done to bring about the healing and reconciliation necessary for the survivors of clergy sexual abuse," he said. "That is why the settlement also includes elements other than financial compensation, such as the continuance of the archdiocesan program to provide counseling to survivors of sexual abuse by clergy."

The costs of counseling are in addition to the legal settlement, which is to be divided among participating plaintiffs in different amounts to be determined by a mediator, depending on the severity of abuse and other factors.

About 200 of the lawsuits involve claims of rape or sodomy. About 300 involve lesser forms of abuse such as fondling. Parents of alleged victims, who have sued for loss of consortium because their children were abused, account for 29 claims.

Right after taking over in Boston, Archbishop O'Malley brought in a new lawyer, Thomas H. Hannigan Jr., to try to reach a quick settlement with victims. Hannigan had been the lead lawyer reaching a settlement with victims of ex-priest James Porter in the Diocese of Fall River, Mass., when Archbishop O'Malley was bishop of Fall River in the 1990s.

Although negotiations were behind closed doors, local media reports over the past month said that on Aug. 8 Archbishop O'Malley made an initial offer of \$55 million, then came back with \$65 million in response to the plaintiffs' counteroffer of \$90 million to \$120 million. The \$85 million was described as a final offer, with taking the cases to court as the only alternative.

In earlier stages of negotiations some plaintiffs said they want to go to court anyway and do not plan to participate in the settlement. While there was no immediate indication how many plaintiffs would participate, several lawyers involved in the negotiations said they expected that a majority would join within the 37 days stipulated by the agreement.

Originally the archdiocese said 95 percent of the plaintiffs would have to sign on for the out-of-court agreement to be finalized. In the end it agreed to make the deal if the number of participants dropped to as low as 80 percent, and attorneys said room was left for an agreement even if the final number went below that.

The total amount of the settlement will be reduced proportionally, however, for each plaintiff that does not join the agreement.

Bishop Gregory said the landmark deal "demonstrates that the church is committed to working out just settlements which seek to meet, to the extent possible, the needs of people who have suffered terribly."