

Bill highlights pain of unborn babies

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

If people can demand that chickens be rendered unconscious before being slaughtered, should they not also demand that unborn children be anesthetized before being aborted?

Such is the reasoning of Carol Crossed, a Catholic consistent-life-ethic activist from Brighton, in response to a bill introduced into Congress in May, with the intent of easing the suffering of aborted children. The bill would require abortion providers to inform women considering abortion that a fetus 20 weeks or older may experience pain during an abortion, and to offer these women the option of anesthetizing their unborn children before they are aborted.

In recent years, Crossed noted, animal-rights activists have pressured fast-food chains to make sure the chickens they buy are unconscious before they are slaughtered. However, no such similar pressures have been exerted on behalf of unborn humans slated for abortion, she said.

"Surely we can have equal compassion for unborn children," Crossed said.

Titled "The Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act" (S.2466, H.R. 4420), the fetal-pain bill's primary sponsors are Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas and Rep. Chris Smith of New Jersey, both Republicans. Yet the issue of fetal pain cuts across party lines, according to Crossed, president of the pro-life Democrats for Life of America.

"Democrats should be standing in line to sponsor the Brownback bill," Crossed said. "Informing women of fetal pain before a 20-week abortion is an opportunity for Democrats to demonstrate they will abandon extreme positions paid for by the abortion lobby."

According to Brownback's office, the impetus for the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act is found in testimony about fetal pain in court proceedings related to the federal ban on partial-birth abortions. Enacted last year, the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act outlawed abortions that involve drawing most of the body of a live fetus through the birth canal, then inserting a device into its head to suction the brain out, killing the child and collapsing its head to



Paul Haring/CNS

Bob Buchta of Long Island, N.Y., displays a large image of a fetus as supporters of legal abortion march in Washington April 25. Protesters at odds with abortion lined the street side as participants in the March for Women's Lives made their way from the White House to the Capitol.

make it easier to remove.

Doctors who violate the ban could face a fine and up to two years in prison. However, the ban has been challenged in federal district courts in New York, California and Nebraska. The California court recently struck down the ban as unconstitutional, and closing arguments were being heard in the New York case as the *Catholic Courier's* July monthly edition was going to press. All three courts had temporarily blocked implementation of the ban while considering the cases.

As of the *Courier's* deadline for this edition, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops was still studying the language of the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act, and had not formally supported Brownback's bill, according to Cathy Cleaver Ruse, director of planning and information for the conference's pro-life secretariat. However, Ruse, along with Rep. Smith, issued a statement during a June 22 press conference indicating that the USC-CB supported the bill's overall intent.

"Testimony in recent federal trials concerning the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act highlighted the fact that unborn children experience severe pain during abortion at 20 weeks and beyond," she said. "It also revealed that women are kept in the dark about this important in-

formation."

In an interview, Ruse predicted the conference would support some sort of bill regarding fetal pain. She also noted that the press conference featured Dr. Jean Wright, a Geor-

gia pediatrician and fetal-pain expert, whose February testimony on fetal pain to the Virginia State Senate described the suffering of aborted children.

"It is my opinion that the human fetus clearly possesses the ability to experience pain from 20 weeks of gestation, and aspects of pain perception are present from as early as six to seven weeks gestation and continue to mature and organize until the 20th week," Wright told the Virginia Senate.

"In addition, the pain perceived by a fetus is probably more intense than that perceived by ... newborns or older children," Wright said, explaining that this was so because "it takes less of a noxious stimulus to create pain in the unborn child," and because "the mechanisms needed to modulate and tone down the response to pain are poorly developed."

Because it unmasks abortion for what it truly is, Ruse predicted that pro-choice groups would fiercely oppose the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act.

"They rely on myths and lies and subterfuge," she said. "For them, truth is the enemy."

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