

200 word version of letter to the Editor (revised)

I write to set the record straight regarding President Clinton's veto of H.R. 1833, legislation banning a certain abortion procedure referred to in the bill as partial-birth abortion.

The President has said that he considers this to be a disturbing procedure, and he opposes its use on an elective basis. However, he believes strongly that it should be available in the small number of compelling cases where its use, in the medical judgment of a woman's physician, is necessary to preserve her life or avert serious damage to her health.

The problem with the bill Congress passed is that it provides an exception only when a doctor believes that a woman's *life* is at risk. The President could not accept a law that fails to protect women from serious threats to their health, including the loss of ability to have children in the future.

The President has said repeatedly that he would sign legislation banning this procedure if it included a limited exception to prevent death or serious adverse health consequences. That common sense position would sharply restrict use of the procedure while preserving a doctor's option to use it the rare cases where it is truly necessary. If Congress were more interested in finding a solution than in creating a political issue, a fair bill could be swiftly drafted, passed and signed into law.

500 word version of op-ed

The ongoing debate over H.R. 1833, legislation to ban a certain abortion procedure commonly referred to as partial birth abortion, involves an issue as difficult -- indeed, painful -- as any confronting our citizens and public officials. If the goal of those engaged in the debate is to solve a truly human problem rather than create a political issue, all participants in the discussion need to listen to and understand what the others are saying. Unfortunately, President Clinton's clear, principled position on this legislation has been seriously misrepresented and misunderstood.

President Clinton long has opposed late-term abortions, except where necessary to protect the life or health of the mother. As Governor of Arkansas, he signed into law a bill that barred third trimester abortions, with an appropriate exception for life or health. He would sign a bill to do the same thing at the federal level if it were presented to him.

The particular procedure at issue in H.R. 1833 posed a most difficult and disturbing issue for the President, which he studied and prayed about for many months. The President ultimately came to believe that this rarely used procedure is justifiable as a last resort when doctors judge it necessary to save a woman's life or avert serious consequences to her health.

^{In April,}
~~Last month,~~ the President was joined at the White House by five women who desperately wanted to have their babies and were devastated to learn that their babies had fatal conditions and would not live. These women wanted anything other than an abortion, but were advised by their doctors that this procedure was their best chance to avert the risk of death or grave harm which, in some cases, would have included an inability to bear children. For them, this was not about choice -- not about choosing against having a child. Their babies were certain to perish before, during, or shortly after birth. The only question was how much grave damage they were going to suffer.

The President vetoed HR 1833 because it did not provide an exception for such women -- for the small number of compelling cases where the procedure is necessary to preserve life or protect against serious harm to health. The President has said repeatedly that he would sign legislation banning this procedure if Congress would add a limited exemption covering such cases.

The President does not contend that the procedure is always used in circumstances that meet his standard -- namely, that the procedure must be necessary to prevent death or serious adverse health consequences. The procedure ~~sometimes~~ may be used in other situations. But the President does not support such uses, does not defend them, and would sign appropriate legislation banning them.

mild or spurious health complaints.

seriously

Many who support this bill believe that any health exception is untenable because it could be stretched to cover everything. The President does not share this view. It is not impossible — it is not beyond the ingenuity of Congress working with this administration — to draft a bill making absolutely clear that the procedure may be used only where a woman risks death or serious damage to her health, and in no other cases.

President Clinton has implored Congress for months to send him a bill that contains such a carefully limited exception for serious harm to health. In the interests of all who face this tragic situation, the President's offer to Congress remains on the table: Work with him to produce a bill that provides this limited exception, and he will sign it the moment it reaches his desk.

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The problem with the bill Congress passed is that it provides an exception only when a doctor believes that a woman's *life* is at risk. The President could not accept a law that fails to protect women from serious threats to their health, including the loss of ability to have children in the future.

The President has said repeatedly that he would sign legislation banning this procedure if it included a limited exception to prevent death or serious adverse health consequences. That common sense position would sharply restrict use of the procedure while preserving a doctor's option to use it the rare cases where it is truly necessary. If Congress were more interested in finding a solution than in creating a political issue, a fair bill could be swiftly drafted, passed and signed into law.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

96 MAY 24 All : 27

May 21, 1996

MEMORANDUM TO TODD STERN
MELANNE VERVEER
KITTY HIGGINS
VICKI RADD
ELENA KAGAN
JOHN HART
JENNIFER KLEIN

From: Jeremy Ben-Ami

Subject: Op-ed/Letter to the Editor: HR1833

Based on the meeting last week, we have pulled together a list of editorials and opinion pieces that have appeared in regional and religious (specifically Catholic and Baptist) press on the President's position on HR 1833. That list of roughly thirty articles is attached.

Also attached are two generic pieces that could be used to respond. One is 200 words and most appropriate as a letter-to-the-editor; the other is about 500 words and more appropriate as an op-ed. The intention was for these to be from either Secretary Shalala or Cisneros. They have both been approved by Elena Kagan. Please give me your edits or comments.

Once we have these two generic pieces, they can be modified to make any particular points in specific editorials/op-eds to which we choose to respond.

I would suggest that a couple of people meet to go through the articles and decide which to respond to and whether to use the letter or op-ed in specific cases. Pat Lewis who handles religious press for the Press Office recommends considering a proactive mailing of the op-ed to a wide range of religious publications rather than seeking to respond to particular pieces that have appeared in the past. We should discuss this option.

cc: Carol Rasco
Debbie Fine
Pat Lewis

200 word version of letter to the Editor

referred to in the press

I write to set the record straight regarding President Clinton's position on H.R. 1833, legislation banning a certain abortion procedure ~~commonly known~~ as partial-birth abortion.

The President vetoed HR 1833 for one reason -- it did not allow use of the procedure in those rare and compelling cases when the procedure is necessary to protect a woman against grave harm to her health. The President could not accept a law that would force women to endure such serious risks to their health, including the ability to have children in the future.

The President has said repeatedly that he would sign legislation banning this procedure if Congress, in accord with both the Constitution and humane public policy, would include a limited exception for cases where the selection of this procedure is necessary to avert serious harm to a woman's health. The problem is that Congress, more interested in creating a political issue than solving a problem, has refused to present the President with a bill containing such a tightly defined exception. If they do, he will sign it as soon as it reaches his desk.

Sincerely,

opposes use of the procedure on an
elective basis,

EDITORIALS IN RELIGIOUS PUBLICATIONS AGAINST HR 1833

1) America, 5/4/96
editorial

- Criticizes the President for listening to a narrow perspective, for not listening to moral qualms of dissenting pro-choice feminists, and for not addressing the problem of the courts' typically broad definition of 'health.'
- Warns that, "Clinton's veto will haunt him - especially among Catholic voters."

2) The Catholic Advocate, 5/9/96
Bishop James T. McHugh, editorial

- Wrongfully calls the President "committed to abortion under any circumstances."
- Says the President used women who have undergone procedure as "political pawns."
- Asserts President's veto not justified by medical evidence (says Congress based decision on medical testimony.)

3) Catholic New York, 5/9/96
Hermine Merz, letter

- Claims that the past four years have been a "slippery slope" into a "culture of death."
- Wrongfully assumes the President wants 'health' to be broadly defined.

4) Catholic Standard 4/18/96
Richard Szczepanowski, editorial
"The Abortion President"

- Claims that the President has done everything to make abortion "as easy as... getting a tooth pulled."
- Falsely states that the President has done nothing to make abortion rare.
- Says veto endorses infanticide, going far beyond devotion to a woman's right to choose.

5) Catholic Standard, 4/18/96
James Cardinal Hickey

- Claims the President vetoed the will of the people, saying most "pro-choice" physicians cannot tolerate this procedure and most "pro-choice" Americans oppose it.
- Asserts the President has cast his lot with extremists in the abortion debate.
- Claims HR 1833 is constitutional, as "no court addressed the legality of killing a live, mostly delivered child."
- Urges readers to write to Maryland Senators in support of 'life.'

6) Catholic Universe Bulletin, 5/3/96
Roger Kostih, letter
"On Clinton"

- Calls the President the most pro-death president in history.
- Says abortionists perform procedure for monetary profit and the President vetoed the bill for political profit.

John and Patricia Jemson
"On Partial Birth Abortions"

- Calls the President extremist, committed to the "cause of abortionists."

7) The Florida Catholic 4/26/96

Archbishop John Favalora, editorial

"President's Veto: Tragic Moment for Human Life"

- Misrepresents the President's position by asserting that the health exception is "tantamount to nullifying the law." The Archbishop states that 'health' is used in this country to justify abortion on demand.
- The Archbishop urges readers to write to the President to express their opposition to the veto and to their congressmen to urge them to override the President's veto.

8) The Florida Catholic, 4/26/96

Tracy Early, Opinion/Article

"Obstetrician: Partial-birth Abortions Never Needed"

- Details the position of Dr. James R. Jones, who says that the "partial-birth" abortion procedure is never needed.
- Says the intent of the procedure is not to save the life or health of the mother, but is fetal death.
- "In cases of special difficulty, obstetricians can always resort to Caesarean delivery"

9) The Long Island Catholic, 5/1/96

Msgr. James Lisante, editorial

- Says the President is endorsing infanticide.

10) Our Sunday Visitor, 5/12/96

Russell Shaw, Opinion

"The President's Veto and the Bishop's Priorities"

- Misrepresents the President by stating that his first political priority is "retaining the loyalty of his core constituency, which includes extreme pro-abortion feminists and their allies."

11) Pittsburgh Catholic, 5/10/96

Patrick J. Gallagher, opinion

- Claims the President's decision based on his belief that he already has the Catholic vote "wrapped up."
- Hopes the President's veto will be a wakeup call for elected representatives to make a commitment to the right to life.

12) Pittsburgh Catholic, 5/10/96,

editorial

- Wrongfully asserts the President is catering to "elites who can deliver dollars and votes." To call partial birth abortion compassion is "the final degradation of compassion."

13) Baptist New Mexican, No Date

Tom Strode

"Pro-Lifers Protest Clinton Veto"

- Calls partial-birth abortions "a gruesome, late-term abortion procedure"
- Quotes Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission President Richard Land as saying "The president's often-repeated excuse of the need for an exception for the mother's health is a discredited catch-all loophole which has been demonstrated to include any reason the mother so desires."

14) Baptist New Mexican, No Date

Editorial

"Ending the Senseless Slaughter"

- Said the President wanted "exceptions that would allow the procedure for just about any reason the mother so desired."
- Says dilation and extraction, "along with all the other horrible methods of taking the lives of pre-born human beings created in the image of God, is still legal and available to anyone who wants it."

15) Baptist New Mexican, No Date

Rick Bentley, letter

"Give Up Tax-Exempt Status to Speak Truth"

- says President's action is "blatant disregard of the Scriptures" relating to helpless children.

16) Western Recorder (KY) 4/30/96

"National Notes"

- The Lutheran Church, usually quite on policy issues, has criticized the veto as a devaluation of human life, echoing the criticism of the Vatican.

17) Western Recorder 4/9/96

Augusta Weisenberger, letter

"God have mercy"

- says the procedure has nothing to do with the life of the mother because the woman is already in the process of giving birth; the procedure is blatantly cruel and painful.

18) The Alabama Baptist 4/18/96,

update

"Land: Clinton 'crossed the line'"

- Richard Land, pres. of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission said veto shows President to be "pro-abortion," not only "pro-choice."

EDITORIALS AGAINST HR 1833

1) Arkansas Democrat-Gazette 2/28/96

Joseph Efferson, Editorial

"Actions Betray Rhetoric"

- says President committed to "abortion-on-demand proponents"
- writes that hypocritical to claim to oppose abortion but support choice

2) Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 4/17/96

Paul Greenberg, editorial

"Open Season on the Fetus"

- States that "There is no method of abortion, none, so abhorrent that it will be banned in the tasteful, modern neo-pagan America of A.D. 1996"
- Criticizes clause No. 943 (protecting the mother's health) saying, "In mod America, what sickness cannot be justified under the rubric of health?"
- Questions whether the number of 'partial birth' abortions performed each year is 500 or more, because "nobody seems to keep strict count."

3) Boston Herald, 3/29/96

editorial

- Claims the President has tried to ensure that abortions will be "unhampered, ubiquitous and government-funded."

4) Boston Herald, 4/12/96

editorial

- Asserts HB was "humane legislation" the President vetoed to pander to political left
- Says the President's objection for health reasons is "absurd," having a health exception would gut the measure.
- Suggests President has switched from pro-life governor to extremist pro-choice president.

5) The Cincinnati Enquirer, 4/14/96

editorial

"Horrific Veto"

- Says the "inhumane torture of an unborn child can never be rare enough."
- Implies President is ignoring pledge to try to make abortions more rare.

6) The Indianapolis Star, 4/28/96

editorial

"When Life is Denied"

- Asserts the President's veto goes against earlier promises not to support funding for abortions of viable fetuses.
- Wrongfully claims the President wants to support guaranteed abortion without limitation for any reason.
- Argues veto is a "surrender to a culture of death"

7) Los Angeles Times (Wash. Edition) 5/12/96

Helen Alvare (Nat. Conf. of Catholic Bishops), opinion

"'The Eternity Within' -- Signed Away by a Pro-Abortion Veto"

- claims president chose to ignore what those who perform 'partial-birth' abortions say: most are "purely elective." Even those they call "non-elective," would be considered elective by most people."
- says Clinton used five woman he invited to veto as political pawns
- argues "preponderance of medical evidence" says this procedure is not needed to protect mother's health, President ignored this information

8) The Richmond Times Dispatch, 4/26/96

editorial

"Partial Truths"

- Claims no medical emergency exists that is helped by this procedure.
- Suggests that many of these late-term abortions are "purely elective" -- exceptions are so rare they should be discounted.
- States the only goal of the procedure is to "protect the death of the baby."
- Criticizes the President for defending his position with "half-truths"

9) The Richmond Times Dispatch, 3/27

editorial

"At Issue"

- Finds there is no reason at all for the President to veto the bill, protecting a "painful" and unneeded procedure.

10) Sun-Sentinel (Ft. Lauderdale), 4/8/96

Cal Thomas (L.A. Times Syndicate)

"President's Mind Made Up Even On Late Term Abortions"

- Claims the President supports "abortion on demand for any reason."
- Quotes Dayton doctor, saying that "'80 percent' of these procedures are 'purely elective.'"
- Says President will stick with abortion lobby, claiming he only pretends to wrestle with moral issues.

11) The Tampa Tribune, 4/12/96

"Clinton's Latest Loathsome Act"

- Asserts "procedure is not all that rare."
- Quotes same Dayton doctor that procedures are elective.
- "Mr. Clinton's claim that he vetoed the measure to protect women's health is false."
- Falsely claims operation is for legalizing the killing of fetuses who could otherwise survive, not for protecting women's health.