

Pro-life attack on partial-birth abortions bears fruit

By Joyce Price
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Conservatives pushing to ban a type of late-term abortion known as "partial birth" or "brain suction" are encouraged by developments in the Ohio legislature and in Congress.

In its recent "Contract With the American Family," the Christian Coalition urged Congress to "enact restrictions on late-term abortions and end" partial-birth abortions, which it called a "cruel and inhumane form of death."

Rep. Charles T. Canady, Florida Republican, "will be introducing a bill in the next few weeks that

would ban the procedure nationally," said Douglas Johnson, federal legislative director of the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC).

Mr. Canady is chairman of the House Judiciary subcommittee on the Constitution.

Last week, the Ohio House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a bill that would outlaw partial-birth abortions in and beyond the sixth month of pregnancy. The bill labels the procedure as "dilation and extraction," or "D&X" abortions.

If the bill becomes law, Ohio would become the first state to ban a specific type of abortion proce-

dures, according to the Ohio Right to Life Society.

A series of drawings published in a 1993 report in American Medical News graphically illustrate the D&X technique used in some second-trimester and third-trimester abortions. They show an abortion doctor using forceps to grab a leg of the fetus and pull it into the birth canal.

The doctor then delivers the fetus' entire body, except for the head. "He then stabs through the base of the [fetus'] skull with scissors," Mr. Johnson said.

The abortion doctor then inserts a suction catheter into the hole in the skull and removes brain mat-

ter, collapsing the skull and allowing extraction.

"The unique characteristic of this procedure is that the baby is partially delivered before being killed," Mr. Johnson said.

The Christian Coalition calls partial-birth abortions "most tragic," given that the "majority of these babies are alive until the end of the proceeding."

Mr. Johnson said Mr. Canady intends to use the term "partial birth" abortion in his bill.

"I would think the bill would be approved by the full [House Judiciary] committee, since the procedure is so brutal," he added.

The fact that the Judiciary Com-

mittee is chaired by Rep. Henry J. Hyde, Illinois Republican, who is pro-life, increases the likelihood the panel will recommend the bill.

Just how often this type of abortion is performed is a matter of dispute. The procedure is most often done on women 20- to 26-weeks pregnant but has been performed later, Mr. Johnson said.

The National Abortion Federation says D&X is "not common" and that only one-half of 1 percent of all abortions are performed after 20 weeks.

"Some 300 to 500 abortions a year are performed after 24 weeks of pregnancy," the federation said in a 1993 statement, which advised

its members not to apologize for D&X abortions since "this is a legal abortion procedure."

But American Medical News said former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, who studied the effects of abortion, estimated that 4,000 D&X abortions are performed annually. The American Medical Association's newspaper quoted a doctor who has performed the procedure as backing Dr. Koop's figures.

Mr. Johnson said Planned Parenthood and other pro-choice groups opposed Ohio's efforts to restrict D&X abortions and that the Ohio bill was "considerably weakened" as a result.