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### **IN THIS ISSUE:**

- Senate passes abortion ban; Bush promises signature
- Florida dispute renews life-ethics controversy
- Bush mildly rebukes general; Rumsfeld refuses to reassign

### **Senate passes abortion ban; Bush promises signature**

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- When President Bush gives his promised signature to a newly-passed bill, it will be the first time in 30 years that the federal government has restricted abortion rights for adults.

The Senate gave final approval Oct. 21, 64-34, to a bill banning certain procedures usually used in late-term abortions. The House had already passed a bill banning the procedure that abortion-rights opponents usually term "partial-birth abortion."

Even many politicians who generally support abortion rights oppose the procedure, which is particularly gruesome. It involves a doctor partially delivering a live fetus, then puncturing its skull and vacuuming out its brain tissue.

Abortion-rights supporters say the targeted procedure is extremely rare and the bill is vague enough to encompass other kinds of more common abortion procedures. They also fault it for failing to contain an exception to preserve the health of the mother.

The Supreme Court overturned a similar law in 2000, saying it was too broad and failed to include the health exception. Supporters of the current bill say they have solved those problems by tightening the bill's language and including in it "congressional findings" that show the procedure is never needed to preserve a woman's health.

Congress passed similar bills twice in the late 1990s. Both were vetoed by President Bill Clinton.

But President Bush, an avowed abortion-rights opponent, has promised to sign the bill. In a statement released by the White House shortly after the Senate's vote, Bush said, "I applaud the Senate for joining the House in passing the ban on partial-birth abortion. This is very important legislation that will end an abhorrent practice and continue to build a culture of life in America. I look forward to signing it into law."

Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) saw the bill's passage very differently. "This is a very sad day for the women of America, a very sad day for the families of America, because what is about to happen here is this Senate is about to pass a piece of legislation that for the first time in history bans a medical procedure without making any exception for the health of a woman," said Boxer, during floor debate on the bill.

10/24/2003

Boxer noted that those on her side of the issue were willing to ban all late-term abortion procedures as long as a health exception was included, but that the procedure being banned by the bill was sometimes medically necessary and used much earlier in pregnancies. "But once I saw this bill come back to us in this form -- clearly unconstitutional, clearly without a health exception, clearly vague...I saw what this is about," Boxer continued. "This is about politics."

Abortion-rights supporters have warned the bill is simply an attempt to create a legal apparatus for overturning *Roe vs. Wade*, the landmark 1973 Supreme Court case that legalized abortion in all 50 states.

While some supporters of the bill have denied that contention, others did nothing to dispel it. "Mr. President, this is an historic day. For the first time since *Roe vs. Wade*, we are going to deal with the issue of abortion and limit the practice in one significant way," said Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.). "This will go down in history as a pivotal day, where we start to recognize that the child in the womb is a child."

The Christian Coalition, in a press release under the headline "One Giant Step Toward Overturning *Roe V. Wade*," also celebrated the decision. The group's president, Roberta Combs, said, "This is a very historic vote for America and it is just a matter of time before the infamous Supreme Court decision" is overturned.

However, at least three separate groups have announced plans to take legal action against the law as soon as it takes effect. The Planned Parenthood Federation of America, the Center for Reproductive Rights and the National Abortion Federation all have said they intend to file lawsuits against the ban.

-30-

### **Florida dispute renews life-ethics controversy**

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Is the Terri Schiavo case a clear pro-life issue, or is there a significant gray area involved?

Some pro-life groups have championed the cause of the Florida woman's parents, who have been fighting her husband, Michael, over her fate. Terri Schiavo collapsed and suffered subsequent brain damage as a result of a previously undiagnosed medical condition in 1990.

She has been in what doctors describe as a "permanent vegetative state" ever since.

In 1998, Michael Schiavo began legal proceedings to have his wife's feeding tube removed, thus ending her life. However, Terri Schiavo's parents have opposed his efforts, arguing that she can be rehabilitated and shows signs of consciousness.

But a court-appointed doctor agreed with Michael Schiavo that his wife's condition is irreversible, and a state court granted permission for the tube to be removed on his order. It was removed Oct. 15.

However, Terri Schiavo's parents and many pro-life groups convinced Florida's legislature to pass an emergency law that gave Gov. Jeb Bush (R) the authority to override the courts and have her feeding tube re-inserted.

The bill was passed and signed into law Oct. 21. Shortly thereafter, Bush ordered Terri Schiavo's doctors to re-insert her feeding tube.

10/24/2003

Many conservative Christian groups and commentators immediately hailed the action. "Thankfully, Terri and the people of Florida have a leader who not only takes a strong stand for life but is willing to stand up against a judiciary who does not," said Tony Perkins, president of the Washington-based Family Research Council.

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said the case reflected the "clash of two very disparate civilizations-the Judeo-Christian civilization, which is based upon the sanctity of all human life, and the neo-pagan relativist quality-of-life civilization," according to a news release.

But many medical ethicists have disagreed that the case is a clear-cut example of life-ethics issues. Schiavo's parents' belief that their daughter shows signs of consciousness is simply wishful thinking, according to several physicians interviewed for a Sept. 23 Washington Post story on the subject.

Although her parents' case was bolstered by videotapes showing Terri Schiavo appearing to smile and look at visitors, such signs are simply natural instincts of someone in a vegetative state, according to many medical experts.

"The CAT scan shows massive atrophy of the brain," said Ronald Cranford, a neurologist who testified for Michael Schiavo in the trial, according to the Post. "What Terri Schiavo manifests is a classic vegetative state. It looks like she's looking at you, but really she's not. It looks like she's grinning at you, but she's really not."

Cranford added that Terri Schiavo does not show the key signs of consciousness in the videotapes -- the ability to "track" with her eyes.

But Joni Eareckson Tada, a popular evangelical author and speaker and a quadriplegic, said that shouldn't matter. On Christian psychologist James Dobson's Oct. 22 radio broadcast, she said even people in vegetative states "have a right to live. They have a right to human treatment. They have a right to be fed. They have a right to rehabilitative therapy. And these are the things that up until this point have been denied Terri."

The case will probably return to the courts, with a legal challenge of Bush's action and the law that enabled it.

-30-

### **Bush mildly rebukes general; Rumsfeld refuses to reassign**

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Ending several days of official silence about the matter, President Bush on Oct. 22 offered a mild rebuke of a high-ranking Pentagon official whose comments on Islam have angered many in Washington.

Army Lt. Gen. William Boykin became a subject of national controversy after news stories released Oct. 15 and 16 revealed he had made a series of comments casting America's struggle against terrorism as a Muslim-versus-Christian holy war.

Boykin, recently named the Pentagon's deputy undersecretary for intelligence, made the comments over a two-year period to various evangelical Christian audiences.

Appearing in uniform, he repeatedly described the war against terrorism to these groups as a conflict between a "Christian nation" and radical Islamists.

For example, during a Jan. 28 speech at a Southern Baptist evangelism conference in First Baptist Church of Daytona Beach, Fla., Boykin described his 1993 efforts to capture a Somali warlord who had boasted that Allah would protect him from defeat. "I knew that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol," Boykin told the audience.

Boykin also has said that radical Islamists hate the United States "because we're a Christian nation;" has described the U.S. Army as "a Christian army;" and has said that President Bush was appointed by God "for such a time as this."

Boykin's job requires him to work closely with intelligence officers from Muslim countries. His comments resulted in calls for his removal from several prominent newspapers, commentators and civil-rights organizations.

Boykin issued an apology for his statements Oct. 17 and called Oct. 21 for an investigation into the propriety of his comments.

Nevertheless, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Warner (R-Va.) joined the ranking minority member of his committee, Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), in asking Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to reassign Boykin while the investigation was pending.

However, Rumsfeld has thus far refused to discipline Boykin or criticize him publicly.

Bush was asked by reporters about Boykin's comments during his trip to Asia Oct. 22. The president said the subject had come up during his meeting with Muslim leaders from Asian countries. "I said, he [Boykin] didn't reflect my opinion," Bush said. "Look, it just doesn't reflect what the government thinks."

Bush may have been reacting to increasing international pressure on the affair. At the same time the Boykin story was breaking, Bush personally rebuked Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad for public anti-Semitic comments he made. Media outlets in the Islamic world have roundly criticized Bush for what they perceive as his inconsistency.

Bush has taken pains since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks to make sure America's war on terrorism wasn't portrayed as a war against Muslims or the Islamic world.

But editors of the Daily Times, a Pakistani news outlet, said Bush needed to take this opportunity to prove his rhetoric. "If the administration's war is really not against Islam, Boykin should be asked to pack his bags," they said in an Oct. 21 editorial. "Mr. Bush cannot afford to have people like him playing the final battle between the forces of 'good and evil'. Isn't that [Osama] Bin Laden's job?"

Nonetheless, several members of Congress asked Rumsfeld Oct. 22 not to discipline Boykin, who is a three-star general and a much-decorated veteran of several military operations.

In a letter to the defense secretary written by Rep. Todd Tiahrt (R-Kan.) and signed by 17 of his colleagues, he said, "We ask that any actions taken in response to Lt. Gen. Boykin's remarks not, in any way, intimidate the free religious exercise of his faith."