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901 Commerce st. #550, Nashville, TN 37203 (615) 244-2495 FAX (615) 242-0065

www.faithandfamily.com

505 Second St. NE, Washington, DC 20002 (202) 547-8105 FAX (202) 547-8165

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Richard D. Land, President Tom Strode, Editor Jerry Price, Assistant Editor

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God's knowledge of, and involvement with, human life begins long before physical conception occurs. God told the prophet that He "knew" him long before he was conceived in his mother. The Hebrew verb used in this verse for "to know" is *yada*, which conveys great meaning in the Old Testament, going far deeper than mere intellectual knowledge or awareness. *Yada* means personal commitment and intimate experience with the person known. *Yada* is used for the sexual union between husband and wife (Gen. 4:1). God not only knew "about" Jeremiah, he "knew" him and was involved in a personal way with him before he was conceived.

This personal and intimate involvement by God in individual lives extends to this personalized involvement in their conception and development. God says that each human life is "woven" (Hebrew, *sakak* "to weave") by Him (Gen. 2:7; Ps. 139:13) and that He knits together (Hebrew, *raqam* "to embroider") each human frame (Hebrew, *etsem* "skeleton") in the womb (Ps. 139:15).

God's personal, detailed, intimate, divine involvement with each human life is what imparts to each life its sacred value and unique worth. It is God's personal interest in, and involvement with, each human life which reveals that He has a "personalized" plan for each human being even prior to actual conception (Ps. 119:16; 127:3; Is. 43:7-8; Eph. 2:10).

Dr. Richard Land

President, SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

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Pro-lifers push bill on unborn's pain in abortion

Pro-life members of Congress have reintroduced legislation requiring women to receive information about the pain their unborn children will experience if they undergo late-term abortions.

Sen. Sam Brownback, R.-Kan., and Rep. Chris Smith, R.-N.J., introduced on consecutive days the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act, S. 51 in the Senate and H.R. 356 in the House of Representatives. Brownback offered his bill with 31 cosponsors Jan. 26, one day after Smith presented his measure. The House bill has 85 cosponsors.

The bill has two provisions: (1) An abortion doctor would have to provide a woman at least 20 weeks into pregnancy with scientific evidence about the severe pain her unborn child would experience during the procedure, and (2) if the woman still decides to have an abortion, the doctor would be required to offer anesthesia for her unborn baby in order to reduce his pain.

Abortion opponents expressed hope there would be bipartisan support for what Smith called a "very modest effort." He looks forward to a day when the unborn are protected by the law, Smith said, but in the meantime, "Shame on us if we do not take immediate measures to relieve the pain" of babies who are aborted. Abortion clinics are "not only killing mills, but they are torture chambers," Smith said.

Barrett Duke, the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission's vice president for public policy, said he could not "imagine that any caring, compassionate person could object to this common sense, humane legislation."

"For 32 years, abortionists have been tearing babies apart in their mother's wombs with no regard for the pain of the child," Duke said. "This must stop. The very least we can do is make sure that these innocent human beings do not have their last experience on earth an experience more excruciatingly painful than any person living today could tolerate."

The other measure widely promoted by pro-lifers at the beginning of the 109th Congress is the Child Custody Protection Act, which would outlaw the transportation of a minor by a non-parental adult to another state for an abortion when the girl's home state requires parental notification or consent.

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Movement 'will not fail,' Bush tells pro-lifers

America's history indicates the pro-life movement will succeed, President George W. Bush told tens of thousands of Americans gathered Jan. 24 for the annual March for Life.

Speaking by phone to the massive crowd, the President said, "I encourage you to take warmth and comfort from our history, which tells us that a movement that appeals to the noblest and most generous instincts of our fellow Americans – and that is based on a sacred promise enshrined in our founding document – that this movement will not fail.

"The America of our dreams, where every child is welcomed in . . . life and protected in law may still be some ways away, but even from the far side of the river . . . we can see its glimmerings," Bush said.

The march has been held every year since the first anniversary of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion. Participants heard from Bush, as well as members of Congress and pro-life leaders, before marching up Constitution Avenue to the Supreme Court building.

The most significant pro-life issue during the next four years is likely to be the confirmation of a new justice or justices to the Supreme Court. Chief Justice William Rehnquist, one of only three justices opposed to *Roe v. Wade*, is suffering from thyroid cancer. It has been predicted he might retire at any time. Retirement for other members of the court also has been rumored.

Supporters of *Roe* hold a 6-3 edge on the court, so it will require the confirmation of multiple Bush nominees who believe the far-reaching opinion has no constitutional basis in order to set the stage for a reversal.

The National Right to Life Committee said on the day of the march a majority of the new members of Congress are pro-life. Seven of nine new senators are pro-life, and 22 of 40 new representatives hold the same position, NRLC said. Another three new House members are expected to vote with the pro-life side most of the time, according to the committee.

A transcript of Bush's speech to the marchers may be accessed online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050124-7.html>.

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'Roe' asks justices to overturn ruling in her case

The woman whose challenge of a Texas law resulted in the legalization of abortion in the United States has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to reverse that 1973 ruling.

Norma McCorvey announced she has asked the justices to review and overturn their *Roe v. Wade* opinion. McCorvey, who was identified as "Jane Roe" in that case but is now a pro-life advocate, has been rebuffed by two lower federal courts in her effort as the original party to invalidate a decision that has produced more than 45 million legal abortions in the last 32 years.

"America is slowly dying of a holocaust of abortion that began with *Roe v. Wade*," McCorvey said Jan. 18 in announcing the filing in front of the high court building, CNS News reported.

Her effort is given little hope of succeeding by most observers. The court has reaffirmed the *Roe* opinion and maintains a 6-3 majority in support of the ruling. It is unknown when the justices will announce their response to McCorvey's appeal.

After working for an abortion rights organization, McCorvey became a Christian in 1995. She also became a pro-lifer and later converted to Catholicism.

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Bush promotes liberty, character in inaugural speech

President Bush promised the United States would back the spread of freedom throughout the world even as he urged a strengthening of American character as a product of such liberty in his second inaugural speech Jan. 20.

After being sworn in for a second term, Bush said this country's "vital interests and our deepest beliefs" are united in the cause of freedom. "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands," he said. "The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world."

Speaking for only 21 minutes, the President said American policy is "to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world. All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know - the United States will not ignore your oppression or excuse your oppressors. When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you."

Bush told America's young people, "Make the choice to serve in a cause larger than your wants, larger than yourself. And in your days you will add not just to the wealth of our country but to its character."

The exercise of freedom should be marked by service and mercy, especially toward the weak, he said. "Americans, at our best, value the life we see in one another and must always remember that even the unwanted have worth. And our country must abandon all the habits of racism, because we cannot carry the message of freedom and the baggage of bigotry at the same time."

ERLC President Richard Land, who was in the audience for the ceremony, called it "a great speech that reaffirmed the timeless verities of the American people -- that freedom is the God-given right of every human being and that America is the hope for freedom-loving people all over the world. And I'm sure that there are people who live in servitude and degradation and oppression around the world who will be encouraged and given renewed hope by President Bush's proclamation that when they stand for freedom they have a friend in the United States of America."

The text of the speech is available online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050120-1.html>.

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ERLC joins brief defending religious freedom law

The ERLC has united with a wide diversity of organizations to call for the Supreme Court to uphold a federal law protecting the religious freedom of prisoners.

The commission joined in a friend-of-the-court brief contending the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) is constitutional. The ERLC supported the brief as a member of the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion.

Oral arguments in the case, which is *Cutter v. Wilkinson*, will be heard March 21, and the justices are expected to announce a decision before they adjourn in the summer.

RLUIPA, which became law in 2000, prohibits government policies that substantially burden free exercise of religion by inmates and, in land-use cases, by a person or institution. The government, however, can gain an exemption from the law if it can show it has a compelling interest and is using the least restrictive means to further that interest.

The case, which is on appeal from the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, involves some Ohio prisoners who assert that state corrections rules denying them access to religious material and the opportunity to perform religious services violate RLUIPA and the Ohio constitution. The brief says the coalition does not take a position on the specific facts in the case but is defending the constitutionality of RLUIPA.

"One vital thing that history and our Baptist heritage have taught us is that it is lethally dangerous to allow governments to discriminate against religion and among religions," ERLC President Richard Land said. "To protect religious freedom and freedom of conscience for all, we must oppose any government's effort to discriminate among religions when it attempts to deem some acceptable and others unacceptable."

The Sixth Circuit is the only one of five federal appeals courts to invalidate RLUIPA. The Fourth, Seventh, Ninth and 11th circuits have upheld the prisoner provision in the law.

The coalition's brief may be accessed online at www.becketfund.org.

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Newdow, allies challenge 'under God' in pledge

Michael Newdow has gained some allies in a renewed effort to remove the name of God from the Pledge of Allegiance.

Newdow, whose challenge to the words "under God" in the pledge was rejected by the Supreme Court in June, filed a federal lawsuit Jan. 4 in Sacramento, Calif., asking a court to rule as unconstitutional a 1954 law inserting the phrase about deity into the pledge, the *Sacramento Bee* reported. Eight others - parents of students in northern California public schools or students themselves - joined Newdow in the suit, according to the *Bee*.

The co-plaintiffs provide Newdow's case with something the high court said last year he did not have - legal standing. The justices reversed a federal appeals court decision without deciding whether "under God" is constitutional. Instead, a majority of the court ruled Newdow, as a father without primary custody of his elementary-age daughter, did not have standing to represent her in the suit.

The parents who are co-plaintiffs with Newdow have custody of their children. They and the students joining in his latest challenge are atheists, agnostics or pantheists, according to the *Bee*. Newdow is an atheist.

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Rejection of 'Choose Life' license plate stands

The Supreme Court permitted a lower court ruling against South Carolina's pro-life license plate to remain in effect Jan. 24, thereby allowing conflicting opinions at the appellate level.

The high court declined to review a decision last year by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals that a state-approved license plate with the words "Choose Life" on it violates the First Amendment when an abortion rights message is not permitted in the same forum. In a 2002 ruling, however, the Fifth Circuit Court found abortion rights advocates did not have standing to challenge Louisiana's "Choose Life" plate.

As a result of the Supreme Court's action, different rulings on the pro-life license plates apply in different circuits. The Fourth Circuit consists of the states of Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina. The Fifth Circuit is made up of Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

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