

Clinton Vetoes Bill Banning Late-Abortion Procedure

■ **Politics:** Valley-area women on hand to back president, who calls legislation a dangerous intrusion. Dole is critical.

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WASHINGTON—President Clinton on Wednesday vetoed a bill that would outlaw a controversial late-term abortion procedure, taking pains to minimize the political cost of a potentially unpopular decision.

Appearing with a group of women who have had the procedure to end pregnancies that went tragically awry, Clinton called the so-called "partial birth abortion" bill a dangerous intrusion into a decision that should rest with a woman and her doctor.

In a clear signal that he will make the president's veto a cam-

paign issue, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.), the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, said that Clinton's action makes it "clear there is no restriction on abortion, for any reason, [that] he would accept."

Dole said the president "has rejected a very modest and bipartisan measure reflecting the values of a great majority of Americans. He instead embraced the extreme position of those who support abortion at any time, at any place and for any reason."

At the White House on Wednesday, Clinton said that initially he had been sympathetic to the bill. However, he said: "I came to

Please see VETO, A3



Associated Press

Coreen Costello of Agoura Hills stands at the podium as President Clinton rests a hand on the shoulder of her husband, Jim, who holds their daughter, Carlyn. Also standing is the couple's son, Chad.

VETO: Clinton Blocks Measure

Continued from A1

understand that this is a rarely used procedure, justifiable as a last resort when doctors judge it necessary to save a woman's life or to avert serious health consequences to her."

Clinton's decision was cheered by groups that favor abortion rights as well as by the families who recounted the wrenching circumstances that led them to seek late-term abortions.

"I didn't make the decision for my child to die," said Vikki Stella of Naperville, Ill., whose unborn son's cranium was filled with fluid and no brain tissue. "God made the decision for my child to die. I had to make the decision to take him off life support."

"The president is a hero for vetoing this legislation," said Vicki Saporta, executive director of the National Abortion Federation.

Opponents of the bill contended that about 500 of the late-term abortions that would have been banned take place each year—a small percentage of the roughly 1.5 million abortions performed yearly in the United States. Most, they added, are performed on women

who want a baby but believe that they must end their pregnancy because it seriously threatens their health or life or because their fetuses have severe abnormalities.

But antiabortion groups, citing in part testimony of doctors who perform the procedures, maintained that thousands of "partial birth abortions" may occur yearly. Many, they said, are performed for frivolous reasons.

The bill vetoed Wednesday by Clinton would have been the first to outlaw a specific abortion procedure since the 1973 Supreme Court decision granting women the right to abortion. In the procedure—called "intact dilation and extraction" by doctors—all but the head of a fetus is delivered vaginally. Before the fetus' head passes through the cervix, however, a catheter is inserted at the base of its skull and the contents are suctioned out so that the head can

be delivered without harm to the woman's reproductive organs.

Three of the five women flanking Clinton during his veto speech are from the Los Angeles area. In an interview, Claudia Crown Ades, 32, of Sherman Oaks said Clinton cried with the women, as they told of the tragic end of their much-wanted pregnancies.

"This was a desperately wanted child," said Ades, who was five months pregnant when she sensed something was amiss and insisted on testing.

Ades told the president she found out that her male fetus had a nonfunctioning brain and multiple deformities during the Jewish holiday season four years ago. The procedure was done on Yom Kippur, the day Jews mourn those who have died.

"I think of him every day," said Ades, who is adopting a daughter in July. "For those who say it was

Please see VETO, A8

Capitol Journal columnist George Skelton is on vacation.

VETO: Abortion Procedure

Continued from A3

God's will that I should hold him for five minutes or an hour as he struggled and gasped in pain, I say it was God's will I had an instinct something was wrong with the pregnancy. . . . My concern was putting my son out of the pain and torture he was going through."

Abortion foe Coreen Costello, 31, of Agoura Hills was also at the White House with her husband and two children on the first anniversary of her late-term abortion. Costello's daughter, who was dying in her womb and could not have been delivered naturally, was named and baptized in utero before the procedure was done.

"This wasn't about choice," said Costello, who is pregnant again. "It wasn't about abortion. It was a medical decision."

The president's veto effectively blocks legislation that was narrowly passed by the Senate last December and by a wide margin of 286 to 129 in the House in late March. The Senate vote of 54 to 44 indicates that proponents do not have the two-thirds majority needed to override the president's action.

But while proponents of the measure knew that they were unlikely to prevail over Clinton's veto, they asserted that they have scored political gains in the struggle for Americans' sympathies.

"This debate has opened the eyes of many Americans to how terribly unprotected unborn human beings are in this country," said Douglas Johnson, legislative director of the National Right to Life Committee Inc., an anti-abortion group. "Most Americans

wrongly believe that abortion is not legal after the third month, yet these partial-birth abortions are often performed not earlier than the fifth month and often much later."

Clinton noted Wednesday that he had hoped Congress would adopt an amendment to the bill that would have allowed exceptions to protect the health of the mother. While lawmakers would waive the ban in cases where the abortion is necessary to save the mother's life, they rejected efforts to add the waiver that the White House sought.

While the White House had telegraphed Clinton's clear intention to veto the bill, Roman Catholic bishops last week led a candlelight vigil in front of the White House, imploring the president not to veto the bill. A poll conducted last December by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops found that 71% of registered voters favored a ban on "partial-birth abortions."

Other independent polls indicate

that while a substantial majority of Americans believe a woman should have the right to an abortion, a large percentage believe that they should be subject to stricter limits.

Cardinal Bernard Law, archbishop of Boston and chairman of the Catholic Bishops Committee for Pro-Life Activities, issued a statement calling the veto "a declaration of unconditional support for abortion—abortions under any circumstances and by any means whatsoever, even those bordering on infanticide."

The Supreme Court, in its landmark Roe vs. Wade case, left to states the right to place limits on abortions after the second trimester of pregnancy—the point at which specialists generally agree that a fetus could survive outside the womb, given expert medical intervention. And currently, 41 states, including California, have adopted restrictions on such late-term abortions. But to the consternation of abortion foes, almost all contain broad exemptions for abortions performed in cases where the mother's health—including emotional health—is endangered by the pregnancy.

of how close the family was, recalling how some people thought father and grown son were "weird" because they still kissed each other on the lips.

At the family's request, Brown's funeral procession drove down Washington's Embassy Row, then east to the historically black Shaw neighborhood—once called the "Black Broadway"—before doubling back to cross once more by the Commerce Department. The gesture was to recall Brown's attachment to his roots.

Brown's funeral was far from the most elaborate official funeral Washington has seen. He did not lie in state at the Capitol, or receive a 21-cannon salute at Arlington.

But the last week's series of memorial events, most presided over by Clinton, made it one of the most prolonged observances in the capital's history. Clinton remembered Brown in successive appearances at St. John's Episcopal Church, the Commerce Department, Dover Air Force Base in Delaware and at the Washington National Cathedral.

Brown's meaning for his many black American admirers was evident even at the end.

Jarvis Stewart, 27, program manager at the nonprofit African American Unity Center in Los Angeles, bought himself a ticket on a red-eye flight Tuesday night in hopes of getting one of 200 free tickets distributed Wednesday morning at the cathedral.

"He was able to move between the Anglo and African American communities effectively and with an open heart," Stewart said, before he entered the cathedral. "That's a considerable achievement these days."