



For immediate release  
June 3, 2003

## A matter of inches

By Congressman Joseph R. Pitts

In 1993 Brenda Pratt Shafer, a nurse with thirteen years of experience, was assigned to an abortion clinic by her nursing agency. She was “very pro-choice” at the time.

Ms. Shafer recalls that, “The doctor delivered the baby’s body and arms, everything but his little head. The baby’s body was moving. His little fingers were clasping together. He was kicking his feet. The doctor took a pair of scissors and inserted them into the back of the baby’s head, and the baby’s arms jerked out in a flinch, a startle reaction, like a baby does when he thinks that he might fall. Then the doctor opened the scissors up. Then he stuck the high-powered suction tube into the hole and sucked the baby’s brains out. Now the baby was completely limp.”

Ms. Shafer never returned to that clinic after witnessing her first partial birth abortion. What she saw was the culmination of a three-day process that ends in the death of a baby just inches from his or her first breath of fresh air.

It’s gruesome. It sounds like something that should be illegal. But it’s perfectly legal. And more common than you might think.

This week, Congress will decide whether the practice of inducing labor in order to kill a half-delivered baby as its arms and legs squirm should continue to be legal.

For years, supporters of partial birth abortion have heralded it as rare and often medically necessary to save the life of the mother.

In fact, the Physicians’ Ad Hoc Coalition for Truth (PHACT) – a group of over 600 physician-specialists – said: “We, and many other doctors across the United States, regularly treat women whose unborn children suffer these and other serious conditions. Never is the partial-birth procedure medically indicated.”

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says that, “there are no circumstances under which this procedure would be the only option to save the life of the mother and preserve the health of the woman.”

Likewise, in 1995 a panel of 12 doctors representing the American Medical Association, voted unanimously to recommend banning partial birth abortion, calling it “basically repulsive.”

Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop says partial birth abortion is “never medically necessary to protect a mother’s life or her future fertility. On the contrary, this procedure can pose a significant threat to both.”

In fact many have misled the public into thinking that this medically unnecessary procedure is rare. In 1997, Ron Fitzsimmons, the Executive Director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers, admitted that he has “lied through [his] teeth” about how often healthy mothers abort their healthy unborn children. He told the *New York Times* that, “In the vast majority of cases, the procedure is performed on a healthy mother with a healthy fetus that is 20 weeks or more along” (*New York Times*, 2/26/97).

Mr. Fitzsimmons estimated that between 3,000 and 5,000 babies are aborted at or after twenty weeks of development using this procedure each year. Statistics gathered since 1997 confirm that claim, showing that the procedure is performed thousands of times each year.

At twenty weeks of development the baby has already developed his own heartbeat, blood type, brain waves, fingerprints, skeletal structure, taste buds, and nervous system. Before he even sees the light of day, he rests and laughs and reacts to his mother’s voice. He moves and kicks and cries and even dreams.

Until partial birth abortion ends his life. Painfully.

Despite what supporters of partial birth abortion claim, the unborn baby feels every bit of pain you and I would feel if something were stuck through our skull. His heart would stop just as ours would. And he would literally be robbed of his dreams.

Ms. Shafer concluded the story of her first partial birth abortion experience by saying, “I never went back to the clinic. But I am still haunted by the face of that little boy. It was the most perfect, angelic face I have ever seen.”

Ms. Shafer understood, as many of you do, that currently the only difference between partial birth abortion and homicide is a few inches.

This horrible procedure is unnecessary, indefensible, and morally wrong. It’s time to bring it to an end.

We finally have a President who is willing to ban this grotesque procedure and this week we’ll get him a bill he can sign.

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