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Doctor testifies in abortion trial

butch mabin

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New York doctor William H. Knorr testified Wednesday that a federal abortion ban would outlaw most late-term abortion procedures he does.

Knorr said the measure would prohibit him from doing dilation and evacuation abortions, or D&E, widely recognized as one of the safest late-term abortion methods.

"I think it (the ban) would cover a majority of the D&E abortions I perform," he testified.

"I'd have to rethink my decision as to whether I'm going to be doing the D&E procedure or possibly risk going to jail."

The doctor's testimony came during the third day of a nonjury trial over the ban, which would prohibit a procedure critics call "partial-birth abortion."

Similar trials also began Monday in federal courts in San Francisco and New York.

Knorr, along with Drs. LeRoy Carhart of Bellevue; Jill Vibhakar of Iowa City, Iowa; and William G. Fitzhugh of Richmond, Va.; are the plaintiffs in the Lincoln trial.

They are challenging a law passed by Congress in October that would prohibit an abortion procedure in which the fetus is intentionally delivered intact up to its head before the skull is crushed or drained.

The procedure is sometimes referred to as intact D&E, or D&X.

In November U.S. District Judge Richard G. Kopf and federal judges in San Francisco and New York temporarily barred the government from enforcing the ban, signed into law by President Bush.

Knorr on Wednesday said he tries to induce large dilation in women so that more of the fetus can be removed in fewer attempts.

The doctor performs abortions in clinics in Queens, Brooklyn and White Plains. His wife is majority owner of the Savannah Women's Medical Clinic, an abortion services provider in Savannah, Ga.

Knorr said larger pieces mean a shorter operation time for the mother and less time she must spend under anesthesia.

Sometimes, he said, the whole fetus up to the cranium presents itself outside the woman.

"My expectation is - the fetus will be removed in large parts," he said. "But it does happen (an intact delivery) because of the procedure I use in dilation."

In those cases, he said, he punctures or crushes the skull to complete the abortion.

"I would not change the dilation method," he testified later. "The fewer passes I make in the uterus - the safer."

Knorr testified an alternative to D&E, inducing abortions by injecting women with drugs, posed a number of health risks to the mother; among them, greater blood loss and puncturing a blood vessel or artery with the needle.

In testimony earlier Wednesday, Dr. Joel Howell, a medical historian at the University of Michigan, said the D&X method was a variation of the more general D&E procedure.

D&X, he said, was not a new technique, but a "logical" extension of the D&E procedure.

During cross-examination by U.S. Justice Department attorney Andrew Warden, Howell acknowledged he was not a surgeon and had never performed or seen an abortion.

Howell was called to testify by the plaintiffs in the case.

"You'd agree that intuition is not a reliable (way) to compare two procedures," Warden asked.

"I can think of least reliable evidence," Howell said.

The trial was scheduled to resume this morning with testimony from Carhart.

Carhart in 1997 challenged a Nebraska law banning partial-birth abortions. Kopf, the presiding judge in that case, eventually ruled the law unconstitutional.

The U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the judge in 2000.

Reach Butch Mabin at 473-7234 or bmabin@journalstar.com.

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