

## *An Unviable Abortion Bill*

The so-called Late-Term Abortion Restriction Act, promoted by Reps. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) and James Greenwood (R-Pa.), is a counterfeit designed to provide cover for politicians who oppose the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act [letters, July 30].

These lawmakers claim that their bill "prohibits all abortions performed after fetal viability," with a seemingly narrow exception. But in reality, it "prohibits" not a single abortion, by the partial-birth method or any other.

Most partial-birth abortions are performed in the fifth and sixth months of pregnancy. Reps. Hoyer and Greenwood do not regard these as "late-term," although the babies' lung development in these months is at most a few weeks short of the "viability" point at which they could survive independently of their mothers (at about 5½ months).

Many other victims of partial-birth abortion are certainly past that "viability" point—but whatever a baby's exact stage of lung development, he or she would find no protection in the Hoyer-Greenwood bill. First, the bill gives the abortionist authority to determine what the criteria for "viability" will be and which babies meet those criteria. Practitioners of late abortions usually insist that "viability" does not occur until well into the seventh month, and under the Hoyer-Greenwood bill, no abortionist can legally be deemed "wrong" in such a declaration.

Second, even during the final three months of pregnancy, the Hoyer-Greenwood bill would permit abortion if "in the medical judgment of the attending physician, the abortion is necessary . . . to avert serious adverse health consequences to the woman." At a March 12, 1997, press conference, Mr. Hoyer was asked what he meant by his language. Rep. Hoyer responded, "Does it include mental health? Yes, it does." He explained that this would apply in cases in which "it poses a psychological trauma to the woman to carry to term."

Thus, the Hoyer-Greenwood bill authorizes abortions of third-trimester, indisputably viable infants, whenever an abortionist decides that the abortion would preserve the mother's "mental health." Any lawmaker who is prepared to defend such a policy should co-sponsor the Hoyer-Greenwood bill.

DOUGLAS JOHNSON

Legislative Director  
National Right to Life Committee  
Washington