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Kermit B. Gosnell, shown in 2010, is being tried on charges of killing seven babies at a Philadelphia clinic.

Doctor's Murder Trial Stokes Abortion Debate

BY PETER LOFTUS

PHILADELPHIA—The murder trial of a doctor charged in the deaths of seven babies and a woman undergoing an abortion procedure has become the latest flash point in the long-running debate over abortion.

Kermit B. Gosnell, 72 years old, who has pleaded not guilty to the charges, operated the Women's Medical Society in Philadelphia for more than three decades until his medical license was suspended in 2010, after government authorities found unsanitary conditions at the clinic, including blood on the floor and parts of discarded fetuses in containers.

In a trial in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas that began in March and is expected to last another four weeks, city prosecutors have alleged Dr. Gosnell—and staff members at his direction—killed babies after they were born, in some cases by plunging scissors into the babies' spinal cords.

Dr. Gosnell also stands accused in the death of **Karnamaya Mongar**, a 41-year-old grandmother who came to the clinic for an abortion in November 2009. A grand-jury report said Dr. Gosnell directed his staff—who weren't licensed to give anesthesia—to sedate Ms. Mongar for the procedure, and she died of an overdose. Her relatives testified on Tuesday.

Dr. Gosnell's lawyer, Jack McMahon, said no babies were born

alive, and unforeseen complications caused the overdose death of Ms. Mongar, according to the Associated Press. Mr. McMahon and other lawyers in the case are under a judge's gag order not to discuss it publicly.

Opponents of abortion say the charges against Dr. Gosnell underscore the violence inherent in terminating pregnancies. They also say the case shows the need for greater regulation of conditions at abortion clinics. Dr. Gosnell's clinic wasn't inspected by Pennsylvania health authorities during a 17-year stretch ending in 2010. His indictment in 2011 played a role in Pennsylvania's enactment of stricter regulations governing inspections of abortion clinics.

"He was a particularly egregious abortion practitioner, but I think that is the nature of the business," said Edell Finnegan, director of the Pro Life Union of Greater Philadelphia, an anti-abortion group. "I hope it opens people's eyes to the reality of abortion and the humanity of the unborn child."

Abortion-rights backers condemned the alleged practices at Dr. Gosnell's clinic that have been described at the trial, but said the case supports the need for women's access to safe abortion procedures. They note that many of Dr. Gosnell's patients were poor women who didn't have access to procedures at clinics with safer practices. "The best way to make sure people like Gosnell cannot prey on des-

perate women is to ensure that abortion stays legal and financially accessible for all women, as is their constitutional right," said **Ilyse Hogue**, president of **Naral Pro-Choice America**.

Details of the charges against Dr. Gosnell have been gruesome. According to the 2011 grand-jury report, his staff often witnessed him killing large, late-term babies, who were breathing and moving. The grand jury said it couldn't obtain an exact number of babies allegedly killed this way, but there was specific evidence for seven such killings.

In one instance in July 2008, a 17-year-old girl was 29 weeks pregnant, according to the grand-jury report. Dr. Gosnell induced labor and sedated the mother, who gave birth to a boy whom Dr. Gosnell joked was big enough "to walk me to the bus stop." The staffer saw the baby breathe and move, but Dr. Gosnell dismissed this as reflexes, and "slit the neck" of the baby, according to the grand jury.

On Monday, Philadelphia's chief medical examiner, Sam P. Gulino, described to the jury his examination of the remains of about 47 fetuses taken from Dr. Gosnell's clinic in 2009 and 2010. He said some had been stored in what appeared to be drink and pet-food containers, and kept in a freezer.

Eight clinic employees have pleaded guilty to various charges, according to AP.

—Peter Nicholas in Washington contributed to this article.