

Abortion foes shouldn't victimize scouts in their fight February 15, 2004

CARLOS SANCHEZ Editor

Whatever your position on abortion, you must concede that the anti-abortion movement has proven itself tenacious and occasionally brilliant with its tactics.

For more than two decades participants have refused to give up. They continue to creatively press their cause. Their latest endeavor in Waco, however, is troubling. They are targeting children in this most emotional of societal battles.

A Christian radio station is urging listeners to boycott Girl Scout cookie sales because of the Bluebonnet Council's affiliation with Planned Parenthood as co-sponsor of Nobody's Fool, the summer conference which teaches children about sex.

By targeting the Girl Scouts, abortion foes have become like 1960s radicals who burned the American flag in protest. They capture our attention but offend our sensibilities.

In the spirit of full disclosure, the head of the local Bluebonnet Girl Scout Council is married to a Trib executive. And the Trib is a co-sponsor of Nobody's Fool, an event in which my own son participated.

Critics say Nobody's Fool exposes children to obscenity and promotes promiscuity.

Because of the successes of the anti-abortion movement, abortion remains a pre-eminent national issue. Because of their tenacity, abortion opponents continue to pile up political support from elected officials whom they helped into office. Because of their tactical acumen, they have had noteworthy successes, such as temporarily shutting down construction of a Planned Parenthood clinic in Austin by targeting its builders.

But targeting children is a serious miscalculation. And anyone offended by this tactic should speak out.

Make no mistake: This is not about the defense of life or speaking out against obscenity. This is about destroying Planned Parenthood. The Girl Scouts merely would be considered collateral damage toward that end.

If abortion foes are interested in protecting us from obscenity, why aren't they screaming about the content of modern-day television?

If they are interested in protecting life, why aren't they just as strongly denouncing capital punishment?

And if their argument is that they want to protect innocent lives, why aren't they protesting our military involvement in Iraq where Americans and Iraqis are dying daily?

It's because they have a single-minded obsession with Planned Parenthood. Girl Scouts have nothing to do with the battle. They are convenient pawns whose value is publicity.

Children should not be used this way.

In many respects, anti-abortion groups have adopted tactics similar to those of Martin Luther King and Gandhi: provoke a response.

Unfortunately, like the segregationists of King's era, Planned Parenthood's response to such tactics has been, "If you just ignore them, they'll go away."

In fact, last week, the Trib was roundly criticized by supporters of Planned Parenthood for even mentioning this assault on the Girl Scouts.

If Planned Parenthood chooses to publicly ignore the Girl Scouts controversy, that's its business. But that should not dissuade the rest of us from showing these girls our strongest support.

I know from experience that if there is a way for people to misinterpret a message, they will. And when you have a message as muddled as this one — that organizers don't want to hurt the Girl Scout fund-raiser, just boycott it — then you have a real danger of people misunderstanding the intended target.

By thrusting innocent children into a political fight in the name of defending innocent children, the anti-abortion movement has ceded any moral high ground that it thought it had.

Carlos Sanchez's column appears Sunday. You may contact him at 757-5703. E-mail: csanchez@wacotrib.com.

