



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 27, 2013

Former U.S. Surgeon General Remembered for His Pro-Life Stand

Former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop (pictured), who passed away February 25 at the age of 96, is being remembered for his Christian faith and for his opposition to abortion. While Koop, nominated as surgeon general by President Reagan in 1981, shocked some pro-family leaders for endorsing the use of condoms to stop the spread of AIDS, he was also praised for his bold stand for the unborn.



“In an era when pro-abortionists tried to declare that the abortion issue was ‘settled law,’ Dr. Koop provided a voice for the voiceless,” said National Right to Life in a statement on Koop’s passing. The pro-life group recalled that Koop’s book and subsequent film series [Whatever Happened to the Human Race?](#), co-authored with the late Francis Schaeffer, “was a call to action for anyone who cared about the value and dignity of human life, but most especially the evangelical community.”

In their 1978 book Koop and Schaeffer wrote:

If man is not made in the image of God, nothing then stands in the way of inhumanity. There is no good reason why mankind should be perceived as special. Human life is cheapened. We can see this in many of the major issues being debated in our society today: abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, the increase of child abuse and violence of all kinds, pornography (and its particular kinds of violence as evidenced in sadomasochism), the routine torture of political prisoners in many parts of the world, the crime explosion, and the random violence which surrounds us.

In his 1991 autobiography [Koop: The Memoirs of a Family Doctor](#), Koop said that the book was an effort to “awaken the evangelical world — and anyone else who would listen — to the Christian imperative to do something to reverse the perilous realignment of American values on these life-and-death issues.”

The [Christian News Network](#) noted that Koop’s two-terms (1982-89) as Surgeon General followed a successful practice as a pediatric surgeon. “He became known as the first surgeon to separate twins that were conjoined at the heart, and also established the first-ever neonatal surgical intensive care unit,” recalled the Christian news site. “Koop performed thousands of operations to correct birth defects in newborn babies, and was considered a well-respected expert in the medical field.”

Koop’s pro-life reputation was a key sticking point among liberal congressmen during his 1981 confirmation hearings, with Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) charging that Koop embraced a “cruel, outdated and patronizing stereotype of women,” and the pro-abortion *New York Times* referring to him as “Dr. Unqualified.”



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Nonetheless, Koop won confirmation and went on to gain near-celebrity status as the nation's top doctor, leading high-profile campaigns against fatty foods and for a healthier American lifestyle, and warning against the dangers of smoking. He recalled that his efforts to educate the public about tobacco use caused him to become "furious at the tobacco industry for attempting to obfuscate and trivialize this extraordinarily important public information."

The Christian News Network noted that the evangelical community chastised the Surgeon General "because of his support of sex education in schools and the advocacy of condom use. Homosexual groups likewise expressed disdain for his assertions that homosexual behavior could lead to the contraction of AIDS." But in his remembrance of Koop, Representative Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) argued that the conservative Surgeon General "saved countless lives through his leadership in confronting the public health crisis that came to be known as AIDS."

On the issue of abortion, Koop was particularly vocal in his opposition to the "life of the mother" argument that pro-life leaders have conceded as a necessary compromise. "Protection of the life of the mother as an excuse for an abortion is a smoke screen," he once said. "In my 36 years of pediatric surgery, I have never known of one instance where the child had to be aborted to save the mother's life." He observed that if "toward the end of the pregnancy complications arise that threaten the mother's health, the doctor will induce labor or perform a Caesarean section." He added that a doctor's "intention is to save the life of both the mother and the baby. The baby's life is never willfully destroyed because the mother's life is in danger."

Melinda Delahoyde of [Care Net](#) crisis pregnancy centers, which Koop helped found, said in a statement that "Dr. Koop took a courageous stand on the issue of life when not many were willing to do the same. He truly made a lasting impact, as his legacy lives on today through Care Net's life-saving work to people facing unplanned pregnancies."

Photo of former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop in 1997: AP Images



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