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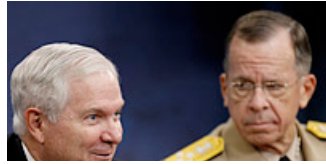
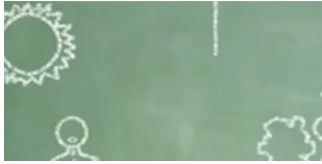
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THE CRAM

Plane Pulling Giant Photo of Aborted Fetus Flies Over Notre Dame

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The controversy over President Obama speaking at Notre Dame's Commencement has taken to the skies.

At around 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, I heard the droning noise of a small plane and looked out my window to see one flying low over campus. It carried a banner behind it featuring a picture of an aborted fetus and words, in bold white letters, that described it as a 10 week abortion. The plane circled the boundaries of campus for at least two-and-a-half hours.

Earlier in the day, I had seen a press release from The Center for Bio-Ethical Reform (CBR), an anti-abortion activist group, that threatened to fly banners over campus and drive billboard trucks around featuring abortion photos on the side.

It seemed like another empty threat from anti-abortion activists, but at 5:30, there was the plane, circling by the statue of the Virgin Mary on the top of Notre Dame's iconic Golden Dome.

And to top it off, not only do we have people flying banners with graphic images above campus, but the university confirmed today that [a student here has contracted swine flu](#). Only one case has been confirmed so far, and the student has fully recovered, but I'm sure it won't be long before some group is claiming that swine flu at Notre Dame is God's punishment for the invitation to Obama.

And it seems as though the CBR's planes are here to stay -- at least until May 17, when Obama will speak.

The *South Bend Tribune* reported Tuesday that the group's [spokesman said the banners will alternate](#) between the fetus picture tagged "10-week abortion" and another that says, "Abortion is terror." The planes will fly over campus for three hours at a time, the spokesman said, and they will try to be here while students are still in classes.

That will be conducive to studying for final exams.

The executive director of the Lake Forest, California-based group posted a [letter on their Web site](#) explaining why they are taking extreme measures to show their displeasure with the invitation. The letter mocks by name Notre Dame students who have spoken to the media, both those who are for Obama coming and those who are against it, either for being confused about the abortion issue or for caring "more about etiquette than justice." The group asks for money to fund the billboard trucks and to fly the planes over campus.

It is this group's goal to force everyone who comes to Notre Dame for commencement to see graphic images of aborted fetuses. Campus rules prohibit on-campus protests by non-student groups, but they'll be in the air and around the campus as students take final exams and as parents arrive to take part in the ceremony.

Will the banners change any minds? Doubtful. Will they decrease the number of abortions? Probably not. And the money spent on the banners and the planes and trucks and gas could have been used to fund a crisis pregnancy center or make some other positive contribution.

I went to a very different event today. Notre Dame's College of Arts and Letters hosted a debate between two students in favor of Obama speaking at Commencement and two students against it. The students were respectful to each other, all made good points and the audience of mostly students listened respectfully.

No one had to take out a graphic image to prove their point.

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