

Hatfield's abortion funds bill called 'dangerous, deceitful'

By Cort Fernald
Of the Emerald

Oregon Sen. Mark Hatfield has received political darts and laurels since he introduced his controversial anti-abortion bill this spring. The bill now faces what could turn into a lengthy debate in the U.S. Senate.



Senator Mark Hatfield

Hatfield's bill, the Federal Abortion Funds Restricting Bill (S2372), was attacked last week by a coalition of pro-choice groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Abortion Rights Action League and Catholics for Free Choice. The coalition calls Hatfield's bill an unconstitutional attempt to overturn the Supreme Court decision which legalized most abortions.

The bill declares that unborn children "are living members of the human species" and its intention is to "ensure that the federal government not kill innocent human beings or assist others to do so." The bill bars federal agencies from performing abortions and funding abortions or abortion referrals. An exception is granted only if a mother's life is endangered.

Hatfield aides accuse opponents of the bill of deliberate distortions.

One Hatfield aide says S2372 does recognize the separation of powers and doesn't overturn the Supreme Court's decision in Roe vs. Wade — the 1973 case responsible for legalizing most abortions. Aides say Hatfield's bill doesn't attempt to interpret the constitution or bind the Supreme Court.

Hatfield's bill was praised by Oregon's Right to Life organization, which called it "an excellent bill."

But the bill has also been called the "most subtle, most deceitful, most dangerous" of recent anti-abortion legislation by pro-choice groups.

Hatfield's legislation is viewed as another anti-abortion effort by a group NARAL calls "The 4-H Club," referring to the four Republican senators — Jesse Helms, John Heinz, Orrin Hatch and Hatfield — who have sponsored anti-abortion bills and amendments.

A New York-based group,

most legislation goes through. Hearings on Hatfield's bill are essential, says Zepatos.

The bill was put on the Senate calendar for debate, the senator's aide says, in order to deal "expeditiously" with the abortion issue.

"Because Congress has had extensive hearing and taken dozens of votes on uses of federal funds for abortion, I believe S2372 deserves to be considered immediately by the full Senate," Hatfield says. Otherwise, abortion riders (amendments) will continue to plague the orderly operation of the federal government, the payment of its employees, and its funding of important programs."

NARAL and other Oregon pro-choice groups have filmed television ads and bought full-pages in Oregon newspapers, Zepatos says. The ads are what Zepatos calls "generic" pro-choice — not specifically critical of Hatfield's bill.

A recent full-page ad in the Oregonian, sponsored by a number of Oregon pro-choice groups, was mildly critical and asked Hatfield to allow his bill to go through the Senate hearings process so the public could be more informed on it. When asked if he saw the ads, Hatfield remarked — "a piece of toilet paper," Zepatos says.

Even Hatfield himself is not totally satisfied with the bill. He is concerned with section III of the bill, which allows "any person" to file a suit "on his own behalf or on behalf of unborn children, against any party" in violation of the bill's financing and insurance restrictions. Lawyers, attached to Hatfield's Washington office, are reviewing the section.

Coincidentally, this reflects the concerns of pro-choice groups who are afraid pro-life groups will use this section to harass hospitals and clinics with "nuisance suits."

A restriction of federal funds to hospitals and clinics would be disastrous, Zepatos says. "Almost all hospitals get some sort of federal funding." The effect of the prohibition on medical research is not known, she adds.

The bill was originally scheduled for Senate debate Monday, but has been postponed.

the Center for Constitutional Rights, echoes the concern of the pro-choice advocates that Hatfield's bill is little more than a watered-down version of Sen. Jesse Helms anti-abortion bill (S2148).

The difference, according to one Hatfield aide, is "we are stating that these are biological persons," so the federal government should protect them. "Helm's bill states these are legal 'persons' and they deserve protection of law and the rights of the constitution," the aide says.

"Hatfield is trying to portray himself as a moderate" in contrast to Helms, says Thalia Zepatos, a representative of Oregon NARAL. Ironically, pro-choice advocates have noticed the phrase "the intrinsic value of all human life" in both Helms' and Hatfield's bill.

While nationwide groups may be spearheading opposition to Hatfield's bill, there are opponents in Oregon as well. "There's a lot of opposition from individuals all over the state," Zepatos says. The Portland NARAL office has received nearly 1,500 telephone calls and letters opposed to Hatfield's legislation, Zepatos says.

Hatfield is getting so many letters against his bill that his office in Washington is no longer counting or reading the letters, according to Zepatos.

One disturbing thing about Hatfield's bill, Zepatos notes, is that it short-circuits the legislative process and the Supreme Court.

NARAL and other national pro-choice groups are angered that Hatfield introduced the bill directly onto the Senate calendar, bypassing the usual hearings process

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