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Abortion bill passes with 64-36 Senate vote

■ **BAN:** The bill failed to get enough votes to override a promised presidential veto

By David Espo
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In an atmosphere of unusual tension, the Senate approved legislation Tuesday to ban certain late-term abortions but fell three votes shy of the total needed to override President Clinton's threatened veto.

The Republican-crafted measure cleared on a vote of 64-36, with the current Democratic Leader, Sen. Tom Daschle of South Dakota, and a predecessor, Sen. Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, reversing their earlier opposition and joining supporters.

The vote to ban so-called "partial birth" abortions sent the measure to the House, which is expected to give its final approval shortly after lawmakers return from a Memorial Day recess. Clinton vetoed a similar bill last year, saying it was unconstitutional because it did not provide for exemptions in the cases of harm to a woman's health.

White House officials said he would veto the measure again. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., said despite Tuesday's vote, "I believe we have a chance to override."

The GOP measure bans the operation except in cases where a mother would be jeopardized by continuing the pregnancy.

Daschle had failed to win ap-

proval last week for a proposed compromise on the issue of late-term abortions, and he said he hoped that "common ground" legislation could yet be fashioned. Republicans said they would be glad to talk to him — after the pending measure had been dealt with.

On the eve of the vote, Santorum and other Republicans had agreed to minor changes in their legislation and pocketed the endorsement of the American Medical Association in return. But the endorsement did not trigger a late surge in support that GOP sponsors were hoping for.

In all, 51 Republicans and 13 Democrats voted in favor of the measure, while 32 Democrats and four Republicans were opposed. Backers picked up six votes from last year's veto override attempt, some as the result of new senators taking office and some because of Democratic switches.

Passage of the measure was not in doubt; only the size of the majority was uncertain until the final moments, and the tension was clearly visible on the Senate floor.

Daschle's reversal was the most public, coming from the party leader and a consistent supporter of abortion rights. A Catholic who is also on the election ballot next year, Daschle said the decision to change his vote from last year had been difficult "because I favor a woman's right" to consult with her doctor about her pregnancy.



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