

Senate approves 'partial-birth' ban

The 64-34 landslide vote will send the bill to Bush

By Tamara Lytle
The Orlando Sentinel (KRT)

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate voted overwhelmingly on Tuesday to outlaw certain late-term abortions, setting up a court battle about the most serious challenge to abortion rights in three decades.

President Bush said he was looking forward to signing the bill, which passed through the Senate 64-34 and three weeks ago was approved by the House 281-142. Former President Bill Clinton had vetoed the measure twice.

But now that abortion rights opponents have a sympathetic president in the White House, the measure will become law — the first federal law restricting abortion since the landmark Roe v. Wade case was decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973.

"This is very important legislation that will end an abhorrent practice and continue to build a culture of life in America," said Bush, who was traveling in Southeast Asia.

The bill bans certain late-term procedures that critics call "partial-birth abortions" because the fetus is pulled partly through the birth canal before it is aborted. It is a rare procedure, but exactly how rare is widely disputed.

Estimates regarding how often the procedure is performed in the United States range in scope from hundreds to thousands of times a year. The procedure, which doctors call "intact dilation and extraction," represents a tiny fraction of the 1.3 million abortions performed nationwide in 2000.

"It's an egregious, outlandish, ghoul-like procedure that is totally — from a medical standpoint — unnecessary today," said Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., who is a surgeon.

But abortion rights proponents call it a safe procedure and say that patients and doctors, not senators, should be deciding the best medical treatment for women.

Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., voted against the ban.

"I am opposed to partial-birth abortion except to save the life or physical health of the mother, and the bill doesn't do that," Nelson said. "If a woman is going to be maimed for life, that ought to be a consideration."

But Rep. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., said an exception from the ban for when a woman's life is in danger could be interpreted too broadly. "Health" is an exception that swallows the rule.

Gloria Feldt, head of Planned Parenthood, called the bill "the culmination of a deceptive campaign to endanger women's lives and mislead the public for political gain."

Polls have shown less support for the late-term abortions than for abortion rights in general. And Tuesday's Senate floor debate was conducted against a backdrop of photos of fetuses and diagrams of the procedure.

Douglas Johnson of the National Right to Life Committee said the coming storm of lawsuits will sort out the question: "Does the Constitution really guarantee a right to deliver a premature infant to within inches of complete birth, and then kill her?"

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., said the ban was designed to weaken support for abortion rights and to garner political support. Even anti-abortion activist Randall Terry has said the ban is a "public-relations gold mine" for his side of the debate, she said.

Both sides agree that the bill will end up in court.

Feldt said Planned Parenthood will move immediately for an injunction to stop the ban from being enforced. The Supreme Court in 2000 overturned a similar Nebraska law, saying it was too broad in the procedures it banned and did not make an exception in cases where a woman's life was in danger.

But Frist said he's confident this bill will withstand court scrutiny because lawmakers laid out evidence that the procedure is never medically necessary to preserve the health of the woman.

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FROHNMAYER

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an enormous amount of energy."

For the most part, student groups have been pleased with Frohnmayer's leadership, and an ASUO spokeswoman praised the president for his staunch advocacy of the incidental fee.

"As long as he's president, we won't have to be on pins and needles," ASUO spokeswoman Taraneh Foster said.

Frohnmayer said he has grave concerns about the misconception that universities are private institutions that "students should pay for because they'll earn a lot of money, and that therefore the state doesn't have an independent obligation to support them." People don't realize that the University is a public good, Frohnmayer said.

While Frohnmayer admitted that some Oregonians think of the University as a waste of tax dollars, he finds the argument ridiculous.

"For every \$70 million invested in the University of Oregon — which is our annual budget of tax dollars — we return \$700 million to the region," he said. "It's one of the best investments in economic development that a state can make."

Frohnmayer's reign has not been without controversy. His staunch opposition to an official University stance condemning the war in Iraq angered many people, but Frohnmayer said he doesn't regret his decision.

"To me that was a very straightforward call and in keeping with the traditions of the University," Frohnmayer said.

er said. "If (the University) remains a neutral forum, the people within it are free and are protected to take unpopular positions."

"(It's) amazing and a little bit alarming to see how many people want to capture the official voice of the University for their particular political perspective," Frohnmayer said.

Another controversy that roiled his administration came in 2000 when the University joined the Worker Rights Consortium, an anti-sweatshop group, and then quickly dropped out. Frohnmayer admits he could have handled the situation better.

"I wish I'd been more on top of the facts of the controversy and the nature of the organization we were asked to join," he said. "It was not what it was represented to be."

Frohnmayer said the University paid a steep price for the controversy. "The price that we paid in terms of alumni disaffection — I'm not even talking now primarily about Phil Knight — was a price that we shouldn't have paid," he said.

But all that is in the past, and the only thing Frohnmayer must contend with now is the regular day-to-day pressure of being University president. As another jam-packed week draws to a close, Frohnmayer said he plans to spend his Saturday enjoying the Duck football game against Stanford.

Any predictions?
"Oh, I think we'll win."

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