

IDAHO SENATE

Panel introduces bill banning most abortions

Bill similar to Texas law that Supreme Court has allowed to stay in place

BY REBECCA BOONE
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — A panel of Idaho lawmakers has introduced a bill that would ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy — before many people know they are pregnant — by allowing extended family members of the patient to sue any doctor that performs one.

The legislation introduced on Friday from Blaine Konzatti, president of the anti-abortion organization Idaho Family Policy Center, is modeled on a similar law in Texas that is the most restrictive in the nation.

The U.S. Supreme Court has allowed the Texas law to stay in place, and it is expected to remain that way for the foreseeable future as the legal options for Texas clinics have considerably narrowed. The U.S. Supreme Court is also expected to rule later



Lawmakers in the House of Representatives debate a bill March 17 in the Statehouse in Boise, Idaho. A bill was introduced Friday that would ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy.
Keith Ridler/AP file

this year year in a case out of Mississippi that could roll back abortion rights nationwide.

“Texas has blazed a pathway that we can follow, and needless to say the pro-life community is very excited,” Konzatti told the Senate State Affairs Committee on Friday. “We can save more than a thousand babies a year from the horror of abortion.”

Shortly after the bill was intro-

duced on a party-line vote, Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates of Idaho issued a statement criticizing the legislation as an “end-run around the constitutional right to abortion.”

Under the legislation, even extended family members like a grandparent or uncle could sue a doctor if they believe the physician has performed an abortion on a relative after six weeks of pregnancy. Legislation

attempting to stop abortions after the six-week mark is sometimes referred to as a “heartbeat bill,” because six weeks generally marks the time that a vaginal ultrasound can first detect electrical activity in a group of embryonic cells that may later develop into part of a fetus’ heart.

Sen. Michelle Stennett, a Democrat from Ketchum, asked Konzatti why he needed to “delve so far into the familial line,” allowing relatives who would otherwise have no claim on any child resulting from the pregnancy to have a say in a patient’s private health care choice.

Also, it could open the door for abusive family members to weigh in on a personal health matter, Stennett said.

Konzatti said the family members would be suing the doctor, not the woman.

“If this were to become law would be unlawful at that point, so the family members would be suing the doctor who performed that unlawful abortion,” he said.

Boise Democratic Sen. Grant Bur-

goyne said the bill was unconstitutional because it would put an undue burden on women seeking health care in violation of the landmark ruling in the abortions rights case Roe vs. Wade.

“The mere passage of this legislation is intended, and will cause, every abortion provider in Idaho to stop providing abortions in this state. That is an undue burden on a constitutional right,” he said.

Mistie DelliCarpini-Tolman, the state director for Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates, said in a prepared statement that the legislation “is sick, and it is wrong.”

“All Idahoans deserve the freedom to decide what is best for ourselves. But instead of fighting for our freedoms, these legislators are deputizing everyday Idahoans to become intrusive vigilantes who spy on their family members for cash rewards,” DelliCarpini-Tolman said. “This bill is an attack on our privacy and endangers everyone’s safety — all in the name of ending access to an essential health care service.”

Dittmer

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A few minutes later, a pickup drove up, the driver hopping out and announcing, “Got some food.”

“Cool,” replied Dittmer. While the man was putting the boxes inside the trailer, a woman with him climbed out of the passenger seat and briefly played with Dittmer’s dog.

“People bring stuff by all the time,” Dittmer said. He shares food with others living nearby.

“I’ve just got food and cigarettes and that kind of stuff, things to help out, you know,” he said. “Any canned food I get, I just kind of set it there, and people come in and they’re hungry and stuff, and they get it and eat — something like that. We just kind of do that little thing between us. We’re

a little community here, just our little area right here. What we’re doing is homesteading.”

The annual Point-in-Time Count was on Jan. 24, according to Katie De Vito, homeless outreach coordinator for Deschutes County Behavioral Health, one of several agencies providing outreach to people here.

She estimates there are between 175 and 200 people living in this portion of Deschutes National Forest.

Just over the past year, the population “has grown immensely,” De Vito said. “We’ve seen a rise out there for multiple reasons. Different camps getting cleaned up in town and (people) moving out there more. It’s totally different with who you ask, why they’re relocating out there.”

Dittmer, too, brought up the high cost of rents: “It’s just ri-

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Duayne Dittmer, 58, has lived at a camp off of China Hat Road for almost three years

dulous, ridiculously out of control. I don’t even know how the heck that you can get that kind of rent. It’s just unbelievable to me.”

The majority of the camping individuals De Vito interacts with are holding down jobs,

she said.

“Transportation can be difficult, so there’s folks that are walking the necessary miles a day to get to and from their jobs,” she said. Others are on a set income through Social Security Disability payments, or for one reason or another can’t afford our absurd rent here.”

Many people are “one missed paycheck away from falling into a very similar situation as all of these individuals, especially just with the rising rent and lack of affordability here in Central Oregon,” she said.

Both Dittmer and De Vito said that water and trash removal are two recurring issues in the area.

“Water’s always tough,” De Vito said. “We take it for granted, filling up our water bottles and drinking that for the day. They have to be a lot

more cautious of how much they’re using at a time.”

Agencies such as Central Oregon Veterans Outreach regularly deliver water to the China Hat area, and Dittmer and others with running vehicles will also drive into town and bring back water for others.

“I’m fortunate that I have a vehicle to do that with. Some people don’t, so I help a lot of people out getting water and all that kind of stuff, and food and groceries,” he said.

Dittmer isn’t sure what’s next for him.

“I wasn’t really planning on staying here as long as I did, but it’s kind of hard to travel around, so I’ve been just staying here for the meantime,” he said. “I’m just going day by day.”

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