

Texas abortion bill falls after challenge

June 26 2013, by Chris Tomlinson



Sen. Wendy Davis, D-Fort Worth, reacts after she was called for a rules violation during her filibusters of an abortion bill, Tuesday, June 25, 2013, in Austin, Texas. Davis was given a second warning for breaking filibuster rules. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)

(AP)—Hundreds of jeering protesters helped stop Texas lawmakers from passing one of the toughest abortion measures in the U.S., shouting down Senate Republicans and forcing them to miss a midnight deadline to pass the bill that would have led to the closure of nearly all the abortion clinics in the most populous U.S. state.

Initially, Republicans insisted they had started voting before the midnight deadline and passed the bill after Democrats spent much of Tuesday trying to delay the final vote. But after official computer records and printouts of the voting record showed the vote took place on Wednesday, and then were changed to read Tuesday, senators convened for a private meeting.

An hour later, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst was still insisting the 19-10 vote was in time, but said, "with all the ruckus and noise going on, I couldn't sign the bill."

He denounced the more than 400 protesters who staged what they called "a people's filibuster" from 11:45 p.m. to well past midnight. He denied mishandling the debate.

"I didn't lose control (of the chamber). We had an unruly mob," Dewhurst said. He then hinted that Gov. Rick Perry may immediately call another special session, adding: "It's over. It's been fun. But see you soon."

Democratic Sen. Wendy Davis spent most of the day staging an old-fashioned filibuster—holding the floor for hours to deliver a marathon speech in an effort to obstruct a final vote. She attracted wide support, including a mention from President Barack Obama's campaign Twitter account. Her Twitter following went from 1,200 in the morning to more than 20,000 by Tuesday night.

"My back hurts. I don't have a lot of words left," Davis said when it was over and she was showered with cheers by activists who stayed at the Capitol to see her. "It shows the determination and spirit of Texas women."

Davis' mission, however, was cut short.

Rules stipulated she remain standing, not lean on her desk or take any breaks—even for meals or to use the bathroom. But she also was required to stay on topic, and Republicans pointed out a mistake and later protested again when another lawmaker helped her with a back brace.

Republican Sen. Donna Campbell called the third point of order because of Davis' remarks about a previous law concerning a requirement that women receive a sonogram before an abortion. Under the rules, lawmakers can vote to end a filibuster after three sustained points of order.

After much back and forth, the Republicans voted to end the filibuster minutes before midnight, sparking the raucous response from protesters. As the demonstrators thundered, Campbell urged Senate security to "Get them out! Time is running out. I want them out of here!"

If signed into law, the measures would close almost every abortion clinic in Texas, a state 773 miles (1,244 kilometers) wide and 790 miles (1,271 kilometers) long with 26 million people. A woman living along the Mexico border or in West Texas would have to drive hundreds of miles (kilometers) to obtain an abortion if the law passes. The law's provision that abortions be performed at surgical centers means only five of Texas' 42 abortion clinics are currently designated to remain in operation.

In her opening remarks, Davis said she was "rising on the floor today to humbly give voice to thousands of Texans" and called Republican efforts to pass the bill a "raw abuse of power."

Democrats chose Davis, of Fort Worth, to lead the effort because of her background as a woman who had her first child as a teenager and went on to graduate from Harvard Law School.

In the hallway outside the Senate chamber, hundreds of women stood in line, waiting for someone to relinquish a gallery seat. Women's rights supporters wore orange T-shirts to show their support for Davis.

The bill would ban abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy and force many clinics that perform the procedure to upgrade their facilities and be classified as ambulatory surgical centers. Also, doctors would be required to have admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles (50 kilometers)—a tall order in rural communities.

"If this passes, abortion would be virtually banned in the state of Texas, and many women could be forced to resort to dangerous and unsafe measures," said Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood Action Fund and daughter of the late former Texas governor Ann Richards.

Senate Bill 5: [www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLook ... LegSess=831&Bill=SB5](http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLook...LegSess=831&Bill=SB5)

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