

Texas Republicans pass new abortion limits

July 14 2013, by Chris Tomlinson



Sen. Sylvia Garcia, D-Houston, left, throws up her hands as she leaves the Senate Chamber with Sen. Wendy Davis, D-FortWorth, right, after the Texas Senate passed an abortion bill, Friday, July 12, 2013, in Austin, Texas. The bill will require doctors to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals, only allow abortions in surgical centers, dictate when abortion pills are taken and ban abortions after 20 weeks. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)

(AP)—Republicans in the Texas Legislature passed an omnibus abortion bill that is one of the most restrictive in the U.S., but Democrats have

vowed to fight in the courts and at the ballot box as they used the measure to rally their supporters.

More than 2,000 demonstrators filled the Capitol building in Austin on Saturday to voice their opposition to the bill, including six protesters who were dragged out of the Senate chamber by state troopers for trying to disrupt the debate. The Republican majority passed the bill unchanged just before midnight Friday, with all but one Democrat voting against it.

"Today the Texas Legislature took its final step in our historic effort to protect life," said Gov. Rick Perry, who will sign the bill into law in the next few days. "This legislation builds on the strong and unwavering commitment we have made to defend life and protect women's health."

Democrats promised a [legal challenge](#) to the measure, which will ban abortions after 20 weeks, require doctors who perform abortions to have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital and require all abortions to take place in surgical centers. Only five out of 42 existing abortion clinics in Texas meet the requirements to be a surgical center, and clinic owners say they can't afford to upgrade or relocate.

"There will be a lawsuit. I promise you," Dallas Sen. Royce West said on the Senate floor, raising his right hand as if taking an oath.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry said Saturday that the abortion bill awaiting his signature is constitutional and will withstand court challenges. A spokesman for Perry said the bill could be signed midweek.

"We wouldn't have passed it if we didn't think it was constitutional," Perry told reporters. The governor said some people say the measure goes too far "but most Texans don't."

Democrats proposed 20 amendments to the bill, including making

exceptions in cases of rape and incest and allowing doctors more leeway in prescribing abortion-inducing drugs. But Republicans would have none of it.

The bill is one of many championed in Republican-controlled states this year by anti-abortion groups set on challenging the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, which established a woman's right to get an abortion until the point in which a fetus could viably survive outside the womb. A fetus is generally considered viable at 22 to 24 weeks.



Abortion rights advocates fill the rotunda of the State Capitol as the Senate nears the vote on Friday night, July 12, 2013. Texas senators were wrapping up debate

on sweeping abortion restrictions Friday night and were poised to vote on a measure after weeks of protests. (AP Photo/Tamir Kalifa)

Texas falls under the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, which has shown a willingness to accept more stringent limits on abortions.

By passing the new restrictions, Republicans pleased the Christian conservatives who make up the majority of the party's primary voters. But they inspired abortion rights supporters to protest at the state Capitol in numbers not seen in Texas in at least 20 years.

Demonstrators packed normally boring committee hearings to voice their anger over the abortion bill and managed to disrupt key votes. They finished a lengthy filibuster—a marathon one-woman effort to use procedural rules to delay a final vote—by Democratic Sen. Wendy Davis, of Fort Worth, by jeering for the last 15 minutes of the first special legislative session, temporarily killing the bill.

That's when Perry called lawmakers back for round two. But opponents said the fight is far from over and used the popular anger to register and organize Democratic voters.

"Let's make sure that tonight is not an ending point, it's a beginning point for our future, our collective futures, as we work to take this state back." Davis told 2,000 adoring supporters after the bill passed.

The Texas Republican Party, meanwhile, celebrated what they consider to be a major victory that makes Texas "a nationwide leader in pro-life legislation."

Texas Republicans said Democrats were dreaming if they thought they

might succeed in taking control of the state.

"Passage of (the bill) is proof that Texans are conservative and organized and we look forward to working with our amazing Republican leadership in the Texas Legislature as they finish the special session strong," a party statement said.

Friday's debate took place before a packed gallery of demonstrators, with anti-abortion activists wearing blue and abortion-rights supporters wearing orange. Security was tight, and state troopers reported confiscating bottles of urine and feces as they worked to prevent another attempt to stop the Republican majority from passing the proposal.

Those arrested or removed from the chamber included four women who tried to chain themselves to a railing in the gallery while singing, "All we are saying is give choice a chance." One of the women was successful in chaining herself, leading to a 10-minute recess.

Sen. Glen Hegar of Katy, the bill's Republican author, argued that all abortions, including those induced with medications, should take place in an ambulatory surgical center in case of complications.

Democrats pointed out that childbirth is more dangerous than an abortion and there have been no serious problems with women taking abortion drugs at home.

Cecile Richards, the daughter of former Texas Gov. Anne Richards and president of Planned Parenthood, said Texas Republicans and [abortion](#) opponents won this political round—but it could cost them down the road.

"All they have done is built a committed group of people across this state who are outraged about the treatment of women and the lengths to which

this Legislature will go to take women's health care away," she said.

The dedication of those activists will be tested during the 2014 elections. Democrats have not won a statewide seat in Texas since 1994, the longest such losing streak in the nation.

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