

Republicans re-ignite abortion fight in US Senate

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Republicans revived the divisive issue of abortion Thursday in the US Senate, introducing a bill that would ban the procedure after the 20th week of pregnancy.

Senator Lindsey Graham, flanked by anti-[abortion](#) activists, put forward the Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, shrugging off criticism that his party's focus on [social issues](#) might be hampering Republican progress at the ballot box.

Amid a changing American electorate, Republicans have grown increasingly split over how to approach social issues like gay rights and women's health.

A historic measure banning workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, for example, passed the Senate Thursday with support from 10 Republicans.

Graham's bill is a likely non-starter in the Democratically-controlled Senate, but he and his 33 co-signers see late-term abortions as one social issue that could help unite Republicans ahead of next year's mid-term elections.

The measure, almost identical to one that passed the Republican-led House earlier this year, would ban abortions after 20 weeks except in the cases of rape, or incest with a minor, or in order to save the life of the pregnant woman.

It would provide for up to five years in jail for violators.

Graham pointed to scientific evidence that a fetus can feel pain in the 20th week of pregnancy, and that the American public has grown increasingly opposed to late-term abortions.

"If science is telling the parents to sing or talk to the child (at 20 weeks of pregnancy), what should we be doing?" Graham said.

"I believe there is a compelling interest in protecting these unborn children who are among the most vulnerable in our society."

Senator Rob Portman said one goal is to make abortion "as rare as possible. This legislation is a step in that direction."

Senate Democrat Patty Murray derided Graham's effort as "extreme and unconstitutional," and ridiculed the political timing as it comes on the heels of a bitter fiscal fight that led to a recent government shutdown.

"It is going nowhere in the Senate, and those Republicans know it," Murray told the chamber.

"The American people want us to focus on jobs and the economy."

Murray stressed that, 40 years after the Supreme Court decision upholding the legality of abortion, she hoped Republicans would have "come to grips with the fact that Roe V Wade is settled law."

A recent Quinnipiac poll showed that 55 percent of voters support the 20-week limit on abortion.

The bill could help Graham shore up support from conservatives who distrust the South Carolina lawmaker ever since he backed the Senate's

comprehensive immigration reform effort.

But Graham dismissed suggestions he was introducing it in anticipation of a primary challenge next year from the far-right, saying it was a matter of conscience.

"I just didn't wake up a couple weeks ago and become pro-life," he told AFP.

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