Arizona governor signs abortion drug notification mandate

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Gov. Doug Ducey signed a bill Monday that requires abortion providers in Arizona to tell women they can reverse the effects of a drug-induced abortion and also bars women from buying any health care plan through the federal marketplace that includes abortion coverage.

The Republican governor made good on a pledge to Arizona residents to defend the "right to life" in a continuation of former Gov. Jan Brewer's tough stance against abortion.

Senate Bill 1318 by Republican Sen. Nancy Barto, of Phoenix, is designed primarily to bar women from buying a policy through the federal insurance marketplace that covers abortions.

Advocates on both sides of the issue said the requirement to tell patients an abortion by medication can be reversed is first time such a provision has passed in the U.S.

Critics say there's no science to show drug-induced abortions can be reversed.

The Senate and House passed the bill mainly along party lines after a House committee amended it to include the medication provision. An anti-abortion doctor, Dr. Allan Sawyer, had testified that he recently reversed a drug-induced abortion at 10 weeks but acknowledged the procedure is not widely known.

Sawyer said doctors can give a woman a drug known as progesterone to stop an abortion after she has taken the first of two medications needed to complete the procedure.

Dr. Kathleen Morrell, an abortion doctor and advocate at Physicians for Reproductive Health, said the procedure is not evidence-based and has not been well-researched.

Ducey didn't comment on the requirement that women be told drug-induced abortions can be reversed. He said in a statement that he signed the bill to prevent taxpayer subsidies from being used to fund abortions.

"The American people overwhelmingly oppose taxpayer funding of abortions, and it's no different in Arizona, where we have long-standing policy against subsidizing them with public dollars," Ducey said. "This legislation provides clarity to state law."

Under the Affordable Care Act, states are permitted to buy optional abortion coverage. Women now pay a small extra fee for the coverage, but abortion opponents say the fee isn't enough to pay the actual cost. Advocates for abortion rights dispute that.

About 75 percent of the more than 200,000 Arizona residents who bought insurance policies on the marketplace get a subsidy, according to the latest federal statistics. There's no breakdown by age or sex, but even those women who don't take subsidies will not be able to get abortion coverage when the bill becomes law.

The legislation does contain an exception allowing insurance in cases of rape, incest and when a woman's life is endangered.

Shortly after Ducey signed the bill, Planned Parenthood released a statement condemning the governor's actions.

"Instead of delivering on his campaign promises to reduce the negative stigma our state has taken on because of extreme and out-of-touch politics, Gov. Ducey has put Arizona once again in the national spotlight for interfering in the medical decisions of women," the organization's president, Bryan Howard, said in the statement.

Planned Parenthood said it will consider litigation to prevent the law from being enforced.

The bill, backed by the Center for Arizona Policy, is another win for the organization president Cathi Herrod and her campaign to tighten the state's abortion restrictions.

She sent out a news release bearing a photograph of Ducey signing the measure.

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