

US House approves bill banning most late-term abortions (Update)

May 13 2015, by Alan Fram

Republicans finally won U.S. House approval Wednesday for a late-term abortion ban after dropping rape provisions that provoked a rebellion by female Republican lawmakers, forcing party leaders into an embarrassing retreat.

The near party-line 242-184 vote marked a victory for anti-abortion lawmakers and organizations. But the path to passage took months of negotiations among those groups, female lawmakers and party leaders, underscoring how tough it will be for the Republicans to satisfy anti-abortion forces while retaining support from women voters for next year's elections.

Even with House passage, the measure stands little chance of becoming law. Its fate is uncertain in the more moderate Senate and President Barack Obama would likely veto it, leaving it chiefly a way for the Republicans to underscore their backing for the anti-abortion goals of some of its most ardent supporters.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest contrasted the measure's strictures with the usual Republican demands for keeping government out of people's lives, saying, "The bill continues to add a harsh burden to survivors of sexual assault, rape and incest who are already enduring unimaginable hardship."

The legislation forbids most abortions starting with the 20th week of pregnancy.

Abortion rights advocates say the measure violates women's privacy and cite doctors' groups, like the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, that have gathered evidence that fetal pain is unlikely until several weeks later.

The 1973 Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* decision established a constitutional right to abortion but allowed states to bar the procedure after viability—the point where the fetus could survive if born. Disputes over when viability is reached have provoked numerous legislative battles ever since.

Forty-two states bar abortions after certain points in pregnancies, including 10 with bans at 20 weeks, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports access to abortion.

Statistics from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that of 730,000 abortions in 2011, 1.4 percent—or about 10,000—were performed after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

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Citation: US House approves bill banning most late-term abortions (Update) (2015, May 13) retrieved 20 April 2024 from

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