

Congressman: GOP Leadership Is Failing to Stand Up for Life

Republican leaders in the House and Senate don't want to stand up for life by rejecting the legalization of physician-assisted suicide in the nation's capital, a prominent conservative lawmaker said Tuesday.

"We disagree with the law," Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, said. "We disagree with the premise of what D.C. did, and we have the constitutional authority to disapprove it."

Jordan spoke in response to a question from The Daily Signal at a monthly meeting between reporters and Republican House members called Conversations with Conservatives.

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee voted 22-14 Monday night to block the District of Columbia's assisted suicide law from going into effect Saturday. The D.C. Council passed the bill in December, and D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser signed it.

Jordan said the committee's chairman, Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, doesn't intend to send the resolution disapproving the city law to the full House for a vote.

A resolution of disapproval is an expedited way for Congress to invalidate a D.C. law.

The Constitution and the D.C. Home Rule Act give Congress jurisdiction over the District of Columbia. Congress may reject laws passed by the D.C. Council with enough votes in both the House and the Senate, if it does so within 30 congressional work days.

Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., spearheaded opposition to the

assisted suicide law in the Senate, and Rep. Brad Wenstrup, R-Ohio, is doing so in the House.

Both chambers have until Friday to reject the Death with Dignity Act of 2015 or it takes effect Saturday.

Either Chaffetz or House Speaker Paul Ryan may move the resolution toward a floor vote, Jordan noted to reporters, and that can be done within 24 hours of the committee vote.

"Right now, the holdup is the chairman," Jordan said. If Chaffetz doesn't act, he added, "it is in essence denying every single [House] member a right they have under the rule to call up this particular resolution."

In the Senate, Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, would need to move a disapproval measure.

Unless the House adopts the resolution disapproving the assisted suicide law, the Senate can't act and President Donald Trump can't sign the measure.

Chaffetz's office did not return an email Tuesday morning from The Daily Signal on the D.C. law.

Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell also did not return emails seeking comment.

In an interview Tuesday afternoon with D.C. radio station WMAL-AM, Jordan said of the city's law: "Congress has the ability to stop it and we're not even going to let it get to the House floor."

Lankford introduced his companion resolution Jan. 12.

"This resolution of disapproval responds to an action from the D.C. City Council and their mayor," Lankford told The Daily Signal in a phone interview at the time. "Congress spoke in the 1990s actually forbidding assisted suicide within the

District of Columbia. So that is something that has already been settled as an issue from Congress from decades ago.”

The city’s assisted suicide law would permit “an adult who has been diagnosed with a terminal disease, having less than six months to live, to receive a prescription for medication to end his or her life.”

The phrase “terminal disease” is dangerous, Lankford’s office argues, because it could be interpreted to mean illnesses such as diabetes and leukemia, which normally are fatal only if not treated.

Physician-assisted suicide was passed in California, Colorado, Oregon, Vermont and Washington and legalized in Montana by a court ruling.

Compassion & Choices, which seeks legalization of assisted suicide across the nation, argues that terminally ill individuals should have the choice to “end their suffering if it becomes intolerable.”

“There are many people that have stated that [banning physician-assisted suicide] removes the ability for a doctor to be able to work with a family, to be able to make difficult life decisions about end-of-life choices,” Lankford said. “That is far from the truth. All of those things remain when a doctor and a family are working together to make difficult end-of-life decisions.”

A physician, Wenstrup said he has strong convictions about not legalizing physician-assisted suicide. In a statement provided last month to The Daily Signal, he said the D.C. law would limit health care options and suggested it could encourage suicide.

“Under this new law, if D.C. residents are not able to pay for health care out of pocket, they may find their options severely limited when facing a new diagnosis, suffering from a

chronic illness, facing a disability, or struggling with mental illness,” Wenstrup said.

Stephanie Woodward, director of advocacy at the New York-based Center for Disability Rights, shares a similar sentiment.

“Any act proposing to legalize assisted suicide puts real lives at risk,” Woodward said in an email to The Daily Signal. “We have a profit-driven health care system where it is all too easy to say ‘no’ to covering expensive, life-prolonging treatment, and ‘yes’ to a cheap pill with a lethal impact.”

Some opponents of legalized assisted suicide say it might appeal to individuals who might not be able to pay for medical treatment.

This was the case for Stephanie Packer, whose insurance company refused to pay for chemotherapy treatment for cancer but told her it would cover the cost of physician-assisted suicide “with a copayment of \$” for the lethal drugs, according to the *New York Post*.

Physician-assisted suicide encroaches on the sanctity of life and fosters disrespect for life, Lankford told The Daily Signal.

“There should be a basic principle for life,” the Oklahoma Republican said. “This is not a medical issue as much as it is a suicide issue, and we think that we should build a culture of life within the country.” {eo}

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