

Anti-Abortion Amendment for State Ballot Clears ND Senate

The North Dakota Senate on Thursday approved placing on the state ballot a constitutional amendment that declares that life begins at conception.

The state senate passed the measure 26 to 21. If the Republican-majority House goes along, as expected, it will be placed on the ballot for consideration by North Dakota voters in November 2014. Proponents seek to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion.

"This amendment is intended to present a direct challenge to *Roe v. Wade*," said state Sen. Margaret Sitte, a Bismarck Republican who is the bill's sponsor, referring to the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. "By passage of this amendment, the people of North Dakota are asking government to recognize what science already defined."

A similar amendment was rejected by voters in Mississippi in 2011. Had it passed, Mississippi would have been the first U.S. state to define a fertilized egg as a legal person. Similar measures failed in Colorado in 2008 and 2010.

There is one abortion clinic in North Dakota, the Red River Women's Clinic in Fargo. Another bill passed by the state senate Thursday was designed to close that clinic by insisting doctors have admitting privileges to local hospitals. This bill would only take effect if the "personhood" amendment is approved by voters.

A similar law was passed in Mississippi, aimed at that state's only abortion clinic.

Sitte said the Supreme Court in 1973 did not have such tools as DNA testing at its disposal. She said she believes the

Court would have ruled differently if those tools had been available.

The measure prohibits all abortions and does not carve out any exceptions for rape, incest or the life of the woman.

Grand Forks Democratic Senator Connie Triplett says that's why she voted "no."

"So long as this proposed amendment does not make some consideration for the life already in existence, of the woman who is carrying the child, [then] we have no business putting this question before the people of North Dakota," said Triplett.

Sarah Stoesz, the CEO of Planned Parenthood Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, said health care decisions should be left to a woman, her family, her doctor and her faith, not politicians. Opponents of the "personhood" amendment argue it would ban not just abortions, but some forms of birth control and fertility treatments.

"North Dakotans expect real solutions to the real problems facing our state—not government intrusion into private medical decisions," Stoesz said in a statement.

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