

House Gives Final OK to Bipartisan Domestic Abuse Bill

The House of Representatives gave final approval on Thursday to a bipartisan bill to renew the landmark 1994 **Violence Against Women Act**, after rejecting as inadequate an alternative version offered by its Republican leaders.

On a vote of 286-138, the House sent the bill, earlier approved by the Democratic-led Senate, 78-22, to President Barack Obama to sign into law.

Sixty Republicans bucked party leadership by joining 197 Democrats in rejecting the alternative, 257-166. Eighty-seven House Republicans then joined 199 Democrats in passing the Senate bill.

Vice President Joe Biden, who was chief author of the Violence Against Women Act while a senator two decades ago, voiced relief that a partisan battle over renewal and expansion of the law during the past two years had finally ended.

"Today Congress put politics aside," Biden said.

Noting a 64 percent reduction in domestic violence in the nearly 20 years since the law was first passed, Biden said, "I am pleased that this progress will continue, with new tools for cops and prosecutors to hold abusers and rapists accountable, and more support for all victims of these crimes."

Republican leaders agreed to permit the vote on the Senate bill largely to get the domestic issue behind them so they can focus instead on fiscal matters – such as their united support for more spending cuts and opposition to any tax hikes.

Republicans were dogged in the 2012 election campaign by

controversial comments by several congressional candidates on abortion and rape.

On Election Day, Obama won a second term with 55 percent of the women's vote, underscoring his party's advantage with this group.

The Senate bill would renew the 1994 Violence Against Women Act and expand the law's protections to gays, immigrants, Native Americans and sex trafficking victims.

Critics – including women and U.S. civil rights groups and Human Rights Watch, an international organization – charged that the House version would weaken protections.

House Republican Conference Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers disagreed and offered the alternative measure. But after it was defeated, voted for the Senate bill.

“Republicans remain committed to protecting all women against acts of **domestic violence**,” said McMorris, the highest-ranking woman in Republican congressional leadership.

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi dismissed the Republican alternative as a “backward step for the women of America,” and said the Senate bill would help protect them all.

The 1994 law created an Office of Violence Against Women in the U.S. Justice Department and provides grants to states and localities, as well as universities and nonprofits, to combat crimes against partner violence, sexual abuse and stalking.

House Republican Leader Eric Cantor voted no on the final bill along with Republican Policy Committee Chairman James Lankford. House Republican Whip Kevin McCarthy voted yes as did former Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan.

The split Republican vote reflected divisions within the party's ranks that have often made it difficult for their own leadership to exercise control in the past two years.

In fact, on a few occasions, including on Thursday, Republican leaders shelved what had been their rule to only bring to the floor for a vote measures that are supported by a majority of its members.

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