

Texas House Bans Abortions 20 Weeks After Pregnancy

The Texas House of Representatives approved sweeping abortion restrictions on Tuesday, including a ban after 20 weeks of pregnancy and tougher standards for clinics that perform the procedure.

The vote of 98-49 came after a full day of sometimes emotional debate. Before the measure can head to the state Senate, it needs a final vote from the House, which is expected on Wednesday.

The House approved the same proposal during a previous special session of the legislature, but it failed to pass in the Senate after Democratic Senator Wendy Davis staged an 11-hour filibuster that gained national attention.

Planned Parenthood, the country's largest provider of abortions, says the proposed stricter standards for clinics could cause all but six of the 42 abortion facilities in Texas to shut down. Bill author Republican Jodie Laubenberg said no facility would be forced to close.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry, a Republican who opposes abortion, called lawmakers back to Austin for a second special session to reconsider the proposal. Most lawmakers in the Republican controlled Senate favor the bill.

Since the second special session began on July 1, thousands of Texans have packed the Capitol to testify at hearings, hold rallies and march.

After the vote on Tuesday, bill opponents crowded the area outside the House chamber, chanting "Defense! Defense!" to cheer on lawmakers who voted against the bill and were emerging from the legislative chamber.

During the debate on Tuesday, Representative Jason Villalba, a Republican whose wife is expecting a baby boy, spoke passionately in favor of the bill while showing his colleagues a sonogram picture of “my son.”

“We fight this fight because of innocent human life,” he said.

The 20-week provision—a version of which has been passed by a dozen states—is based on controversial research suggesting fetuses feel pain at that point in the pregnancy.

Bill opponent Representative Senfronia Thompson, a Democrat, unsuccessfully proposed an amendment to exempt victims of rape and incest from the 20-week provision.

“I don’t think that you want to traumatize (a) young woman by making her carry a child that her stepfather has impregnated her with, or her father,” Thompson said.

Thompson held up a coat hanger to make the point that women may be forced to turn to unsafe abortion methods.

Last week, two states imposed new abortion restrictions.

Ohio stripped funding from Planned Parenthood and put new requirements on those performing and seeking abortions. Wisconsin passed a law requiring women seeking an abortion to undergo an ultrasound and new requirements on doctors performing abortions. A federal judge on Monday temporarily blocked a portion of that law.

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