

States respond to high court abortion ruling

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Last July's U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* indirectly invited states to enact more restrictive abortion legislation.

And state legislatures this year are responding, although the pro-life movement does not always like the lawmakers' response.

Pro-life legislation advanced in South Carolina, Mississippi, Michigan, Wisconsin and Alabama, and stalled in New Hampshire and Virginia. But rarely could a

win or a loss be considered the last word as the political process unfolded.

Indiana, Maryland and West Virginia, meanwhile, are still in the throes of the debate.

The South Carolina Senate passed a parental-consent bill Feb. 14. The state's House of Representatives, which had unanimously passed a similar version in 1989, was expected to concur with the Senate bill Feb. 21.

The bill requires parents who refuse to give consent to provide for the upkeep of their minor daughter and her child until the daughter turns 18. It also requires the state

to distribute information on non-profit adoption agencies along with information from the state department of social services.

South Carolina Gov. Carroll Campbell was expected to sign the bill. In his State of the State message, he urged the General Assembly to pass parental-consent legislation.

Mississippi's Legislature has passed by overwhelming margins two bills restricting abortion.

One is an informed-consent bill, requiring the state to tell a pregnant woman about alternatives to abortion and to describe the

abortion process. The other bill would place abortion clinics under the same regulations as ambulatory-care facilities, said Barbara Whitehead, executive director of Mississippi Right to Life.

Will Mississippi Gov. Ray Mabus sign the bills? "We have no idea what he's going to do," Whitehead told Catholic News Service Feb. 16, "but we're not holding our breath."

Whitehead said the Legislature has the votes to override in the event of a veto.

In Michigan, Gov. James Blanchard is "99 percent" sure of vetoing a parental-consent bill, Michigan Right to Life legislative director Ed Rivet told CNS.

Rivet estimates pro-life forces are about five votes short of the two-thirds majority necessary for an override in the Michigan House, which was expected to vote Feb. 21 on whether to concur with the Senate version that passed Feb. 14.

But under the Michigan Constitution, a citizen initiative with enough signatures can compel the Legislature to vote on the consent legislation and avoid a gubernatorial veto. Such an action may be necessary, according to Rivet.

The tactic worked in 1988, when citizens sidestepped the governor to have the Legislature ban state funding for Medicaid abortions.

The Wisconsin Assembly voted Jan. 31 to require minors to get parental consent before an abortion, and defeated an effort to repeal a dormant law that penalized doc-

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National bar association supports abortion rights

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Mark E. Chopko, general counsel of the U.S. Catholic Conference, called the American Bar Association's Feb. 13 resolution supporting abortion rights a "deeply disturbing" action "of which I, as a lawyer, am ashamed."

Meeting in Los Angeles, the association's policy-making House of Delegates approved by a 2-to-1 margin a resolution opposing "legislation or other government action that interferes with ... the decision to terminate the pregnancy." It called abortion a matter of "fundamental rights of privacy and equality."

Chopko, who is a member of the association, called the resolution "more expansive than current law" and said it places the ABA "on the fringe of American public

opinion."

The resolution puts the ABA in a position of "abortion advocacy," Chopko said.

"The proponents of the resolution made no secret of their intent to use ABA endorsement as a weapon in the legislatures and the courts to preserve and expand abortion on demand," he said.

As general counsel of the USCC, the U.S. bishops' public policy agency, Chopko is chief coordinator of the bishops' efforts at the federal legislative and judicial levels to restore legal restrictions on abortion.

He said that although questions about the constitutionality of abortion "remain controversial and unsettled," the new ABA policy "lends an air of illegitimacy to the

legal opinions that I share with many thousands of lawyers."

Chopko praised the ABA president and president-elect, who opposed the resolution, and ABA Treasurer Joseph P. Nolan, who led the fight against it and resigned in protest after it was approved.

"Their willingness to place their professional reputation and personal convictions against the resolution commands my respect," he said.

Chopko told Catholic News Service that he has considered resigning from the ABA because of the resolution, but did not know yet whether he would do so.

Some association members have called for reconsideration of the House of Delegates resolution in August. The general convention could overturn a House action.



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