

Louisiana governor halts tough abortion bill

NEW ORLEANS (CNS) — Archbishop Francis B. Schulte of New Orleans July 27 urged Louisiana legislators to vote for a special session to override Gov. Buddy Roemer's veto of a bill restricting abortions.

Roemer announced earlier July 27 that the bill — which would have banned abortions in the state except to save the life of the mother and in cases of rape and incest — did not meet "even the minimum standards set forth by me long ago." He specifically cited its provisions on rape.

The archbishop issued a statement saying he was "very disappointed" and concluded: "I urge the Legislature to vote for a veto session at which the governor's veto can be overridden."

A veto session will be held automatically Aug. 18 unless legislators, by a simple majority, vote in a mail ballot against one. No veto session has been held since the state's 1971 constitution went into effect.

The bill passed both houses by more than the two-thirds margins needed for an override.

No governor's veto has been overridden by a Louisiana Legislature during this century.

"Had the governor allowed the bill to become law — even without his signature — thousands of unborn lives could have been saved," Archbishop Schulte said.

He thanked members of the state House of Representatives and the Senate who voted for the bill, called the toughest passed by lawmakers in the 50 states.

"It was a difficult vote for many members of the Legislature in the face of a very vocal opposition," the archbishop said.

"We commend them for having the great courage to vote their convictions on behalf of the most innocent and defenseless among us — the unborn," his statement said.

Previously, the Legislature failed by three votes to override Roemer's veto of a more restrictive bill, which did not include the exceptions for rape and incest on which the governor had said he would insist.

As the regular session ended, the lawmakers put together the second measure, which included the exceptions for

rape and incest. It passed July 8.

"The incest provisions are as I desire," Roemer said July 27, "giving a first-trimester period of personal decision." But rape, he said, "is treated unevenly and unsatisfactorily."

In his veto message, Roemer said, "Forcing a rape victim to report to law enforcement officials and seek medical treatment, all within seven days of the crime, is an onerous burden. Under this bill, sheer trauma or ignorance would force a woman to bear and give birth to a child conceived in brutality."

Doctors performing abortions would have faced minimum penalties of one year imprisonment and \$10,000 fines and maximum sentences of 10 years and \$100,000 fines under the bill.

Sharon Fontenot, legislative director of the Louisiana Right to Life Federation, said the governor "has bowed to the pro-abortion extremists who insist that abortion be available for any reason throughout all nine months of pregnancy."

The National Right to Life Committee in Washington said Roemer abandoned "his pro-life principles" and "betrayed the pro-

life majority which elected him."

"This betrayal will galvanize the pro-life majority in Louisiana and nationwide," said Dr. John Wilke, committee president.

In Washington, the executive director of the U.S. bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities, Vincentian Father John W. Gouldrick, said it was "indeed sad" that the "courageous step in the right direction" taken by Louisiana lawmakers "had to yield to those who do not place value on human life at its beginning stages."

Father Gouldrick also said that if the trend develops "permitting some in society to decide that others should not live, you have to wonder who the next class of vulnerable persons will be who are devalued."

Lisa Salcedo, press secretary of the Texas Right to Life Committee, said Roemer's veto "demonstrates the importance of electing a Texas governor who not only says he's pro-life, but who is willing to act on his commitment to protecting mothers and their unborn children."

After the second bill passed the Legislature, the seven Louisiana bishops issued a statement July 9 praising

lawmakers for passing the bill but noting it contained exceptions for rape and incest.

Their statement quoted Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York, who has called bills with such exceptions "imperfect."

"Such legislation is 'supported' only as the lesser of evils," the cardinal was quoted as saying, "and those who support it will continue to work toward legislation which prohibits the killing of any unborn, for any reason."

State Rep. Woody Jenkins, author of the more restrictive bill, said he would try to get his version adopted once more in a veto session of the Louisiana Legislature.

In the past, a majority of Louisiana lawmakers have mailed back ballots, thus voting against special sessions to consider vetoes.

Cheryl Robinson, speaking for the Eagle Forum in Louisiana, said that with the resignation of Justice William J. Brennan from the U.S. Supreme Court, "we feel that it is more important than ever to present that court with a viable bill giving them a chance to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*," the 1973 case that made abortion a constitutional right.

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