

Congressional panels recording conflicting abortion legislation

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Abortion was a hot topic in Congress in mid-May, with conflicting votes on the inclusion of abortion in health care for veterans and for the general population and final approval of a controversial bill on protests at abortion clinics.

A House subcommittee's vote to keep abortion funds out of the Veterans Administration system signals the first round in a lengthy battle over abortion's place in health care reform, according to one lawmaker.

The Hospital and Health Care Subcommittee of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee voted 11-8 May 11 to prohibit abortions from being performed at VA hospitals and or being paid for by VA money.

"We have more pro-life votes in the full House" to make the amendment stick, said Rep. Christopher Smith, R-N.J., who offered the amendment, but "in the Senate it's going to be a very close call."

VA hospitals would still be able to perform abortions in cases of rape, incest and to save the mother's life, a provision similar to the Hyde Amendment on federally funded Medicaid abortions.

A day later, in action by a different House subcommittee, abortion coverage survived an attempt by lawmakers opposed to abortion to remove it from a version of President Clinton's health plan.

The May 12 vote in the Labor and Management Relations Subcommittee of the House Education and Labor Committee was 16-11 in favor of keeping abortion covered.

Rep. Ron Klink, D-Pa., introduced the amendment that would have removed abortion from the basic benefit package guaranteed to all Americans under the version of the Clinton plan being debated by the panel. "Don't make me or anyone else pay for something I don't believe in," he said.

C.J. Doyle, operations director of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, criticized the

subcommittee vote as "an attack on the consciences of tens of millions of Americans."

Meanwhile, pro-life groups threatened to seek an injunction against a bill imposing prison terms and stiff fines on abortion protesters who threaten violence or intimidate abortion clinic workers or patients.

The Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, also known as FACE, received final Senate approval on a 69-30 vote May 12; the House passed the compromise version of the bill, 241-174, a week earlier. Clinton, who has strongly backed the bill and made its passage a priority, was certain to sign it.

"The day President Clinton signs FACE, American Life League will be in court seeking an injunction to prevent this new law from going into effect," said Judie Brown, president of the Stafford, Va.-based league.

Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice, said the law "is likely to be challenged in the courts on the grounds of violating (pro-life demonstrators') free-speech rights."

The legislation bars force, the threat of force or physical obstruction aimed at injuring, intimidating or interfering with patients or providers of abortion services or people seeking to exercise religious freedom at a place of worship.

The U.S. Supreme Court recently heard oral arguments in another case involving abortion protesters at a Florida clinic. The protesters are challenging the constitutionality of a court order prohibiting protest activity within 100 yards of an abortion clinic in Melbourne, Fla., or at the homes of its workers.

In a similar case, a Houston jury May 9 ordered groups that oppose abortion and their leaders to pay Planned Parenthood more than \$1 million in punitive damages atop \$200,000 in actual damages for disrupting abortion clinic business in Houston during the 1992 Republican National Convention.



AP/Wide World Photos

Celebrating Mary

An unidentified woman May 12 crawls up the 100-yard granite path to the Catholic Shrine of the Virgin of Fatima, located 70 miles north of Lisbon, Portugal. Tens of thousands of pilgrims braved the heavy rains to celebrate the 77th anniversary of the Virgin Mary's reported appearance to three child shepherds at the site.

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Breyer draws early Senate support

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Supreme Court nominee Judge Stephen G. Breyer won early praise from senators whose votes will be needed to confirm him to the court, but drew words of caution from outside interest groups.

On May 13 President Clinton nominated Breyer, chief judge of the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston, to the high court and formally introduced him in a White House ceremony May 16.

While Democratic and Republican

members of the Senate were supportive of Breyer's nomination, there was quick criticism of him from the National Right to Life Committee.

"It is perfectly clear that Breyer will take an expansive view of 'abortion rights,'" said a May 13 statement from National Right to Life legislative director Douglas Johnson. He cited a vote by Breyer to overturn Bush administration regulations restricting staff at federally funded family planning clinics from encouraging patients to have abortions. The Supreme Court later upheld the regulations as constitutional.

With Breyer's wife, three children and other family members looking on in the Rose Garden, Clinton introduced the 55-year-old judge as a consensus-builder and an insightful leader who would help unite the court to speak "with a clear voice."

After noting that he hoped the late Justice Arthur Goldberg, for whom he clerked in the Supreme Court, would be proud of him, Breyer said he wished his father, who worked for the San Francisco public school district for 40 years, could have seen him that day.

Taking a few questions from the press, Breyer sidestepped queries on the *Roe vs. Wade* ruling that legalized abortion. He said he would leave such answers to the confirmation hearings, which will be held by the Senate this summer.

In addition to family members, the ceremony was attended by several members of the president's Cabinet as well as most of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Utah Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch, the committee's minority leader, said he would support Breyer's nomination in the Senate.

Young adults set to meet

PITTSFORD — The group Young Adult Christians is seeking participants for a service project to be conducted on Sunday, May 22, at St. Louis Church, 60 S. Main St.

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