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Senate Unit Passes Abortion Bill

WASHINGTON (UPI) — The Senate Judiciary Committee Wednesday approved by a 10-7 vote Sen. Orrin Hatch's proposed constitutional amendment that would allow Congress and the 50 states to restrict abortion.

Several senators who voted for the proposal expressed serious doubts and it was certain to encounter attempts to amend it on the Senate floor. An amendment must get a two-thirds vote in Congress and ratification by three-fourths of the states to become effective.

Those who voted for the amendment were: Sens. Hatch, Paul Lax-

alt, R-Nev.; Robert Dole, R-Kans.; Alan Simpson, R-Wyo.; John East, R-N.C.; Charles Grassley, R-Iowa; Jeremiah Denton, R-Ala.; Joseph Biden, D-Del.; Dennis DeConcini, D-Ariz.; and Chairman Strom Thurmond, R-S.C.

Those opposing the amendment were: Sens. Charles Mathias, R-Md.; Arlen Specter, R-Pa.; Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass.; Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va.; Howard Metzenbaum, D-Ohio; Patrick Leahy, D-Vt.; and Max Baucus, D-Mont.

The proposal would provide that whichever law was more restrictive — federal law or a state law — would

prevail. Hatch said the proposal represented the "hard middle" between persons who would ban abortion completely and those who would allow women to make a choice.

Biden said abortion was "the single most controversial issue in the United States of America" and the vote was his most difficult as senator.

Simpson, although finally voting for the amendment, said it would mean that "we have effectively saddled ourselves forever" with what he said was a very, very tedious issue.

Given the nature of the amendment with its provision for both congressional and state action, Simpson

asked in the crowded committee room, "how are we to prevent this from continually coming back to us."

Simpson said he preferred to leave the matter to the states. Thurmond replied that he concurred with Simpson's disagreements and would seek to amend the proposal on the floor.

Dole also said he had "serious problems" with the proposal. Grassley, who also voted for the proposal, said he preferred a constitutional amendment that placed an outright ban on abortion. Denton also called for "nothing short of full protection" for the fetus.

East, who held lengthy hearings on

a bill would give fetuses limited constitutional rights by defining human life as starting at conception, voted for the proposal but protested that it did not "address the fundamental question of the right to life."

The National Abortion Rights League said the vote was "a setback but not a defeat," and added "we continue to be astounded at the willingness of public officials to ignore what is clearly the will of the American people on this issue."

Dr. J.C. Wilkie, president of the National Right to Life Committee, said the vote was "a major victory... and a milestone in the campaign to

restore legal protection to the most defenseless members of the human family." The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, one of the major supporters of the Hatch amendment, immediately hailed the vote as "an auspicious event for the cause of the unborn."

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