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Julie Asher

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In a vote on the eve of the annual March for Life, the Senate Jan. 17 failed to pass a measure that would have codified the Hyde Amendment, which forbids federal funding for most abortions or abortion-related care.

Called the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion and Abortion Insurance Full Disclosure Act of 2019, or S. 109, the bill also would have required health plans offered under the Affordable Care Act to disclose "the extent of their coverage for abortion and the amount of any surcharge for that coverage to consumers."

Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-life Activities, wrote Congress ahead of the vote to urge support for the bill.

"Abortion is a false and violent response to an unplanned pregnancy that turns a woman in crisis and her unborn child against each other," he said, adding that the federal government "should not force taxpayers to subsidize this violence."

A USCCB spokeswoman on pro-life expressed disappointment in the Senate's failure to pass the measure.

"Taxpayer dollars should not pay for abortion. The majority of Americans, including many who consider themselves pro-choice, agree on this," said Kat Talalas.

"The USCCB urges the House and Senate to work together to pass legislation that reflects the will of the American people, and prevents tax dollars from funding elective abortion," she said in a statement.

In the House Jan. 17, in a bipartisan version of the bill was introduced by Reps. Chris Smith, R-New Jersey, Dan Lipinski, D-Illinois, and Andy Harris, R-Maryland.

Since 1976, "the Hyde Amendment has saved at least 2 million lives: because public funds were unavailable to effectuate their violent demise, these individuals survived, and their mothers benefited from prenatal health care and support," Smith said in a statement.

He cited statistics from the Washington-based Charlotte Lozier Institute, the education and research arm of the Susan B. Anthony List pro-life organization.

"Two million survivors have had the opportunity to live and enjoy the first and most basic of all human rights -- the right to life. It's time to make the Hyde Amendment permanent law," Smith said.

President Donald Trump said in a Jan. 17 statement ahead of the failed vote that he would have signed the bill if it had reached his desk. A statement from the administration note that S. 109 "would not affect the treatment of any complication caused or worsened by an abortion" or denied abortions "in the case of rape, incest or preserving the life of the mother.

By codifying the Hyde Amendment, the statement said, it would protect "the conscience rights of taxpayers who find abortion morally or religiously objectionable."

The Senate vote was 48-47 in favor of S. 109, but the bill needed 60 votes to advance.

Nevertheless, Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the Susan B. Anthony List, said the outcome still sent "a strong signal" that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, and "the pro-life Senate majority will be a 'brick wall' against pro-abortion House Democrats' extreme agenda, which includes forcing taxpayers to pay for abortion on demand by repealing the Hyde Amendment.

The long-standing Hyde Amendment has exceptions for abortions in cases of rape, incest, or when the life of the woman would be endangered. The language in the trafficking measure, known as S. 178, accounts for the fact because the federal grants it creates would be funded by fees rather than taxes.

Hyde has routinely been applied to annual appropriations bill since 1976.

The Affordable Care Act was passed in 2010 without Hyde Amendment-like protections. A day after he signed it into law, President Barack Obama issued an executive order to applying the Hyde Amendment restrictions to health insurance exchanges getting federal subsidies.

Despite the order, the Government Accountability Office in a September 2014 report identified more than 1,000 such plans that cover elective abortions.

The health care law also required insurers to estimate the cost of coverage of abortion per enrollee per month and to collect from each enrollee a premium for that coverage that is "segregated from any other premium amounts."

Dannenfelser praised the only two Democrats who voted for the measure, Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, and Bob Casey of Pennsylvania.

In other Senate action on pro-life issues, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, reintroduced the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act Jan. 17. The measure would limit late-term abortions more than halfway through pregnancy, a point when science shows unborn children can feel pain.

On Jan. 16, 169 House members led by Smith and 49 senators led by Sen. Steve Daines, R-Montana, sent two companion letters asking Trump to veto any legislation that would weaken federal pro-life policy.

Smith said the letter asked Trump "to continue his work in defense of life. My colleagues and I are also committed to protecting both unborn children and their mothers from the violence of abortion."

The signers are committed to sustaining "any veto issued by the president on the grounds that any pro-life provision has been weakened or removed," Smith added.

In a statement, Daines said lawmakers "will not allow hard fought protections for the unborn to be undone. I stand strongly in defense of the president's pro-life victories

and will continue to work with my colleagues to advance our pro-life agenda."

The senators' letter also noted the administration's work to "ensure the conscience rights of health care professionals are protected" and its Protect Life Rule to exclude abortion providers, including Planned Parenthood, from funding under the Title X Family Planning Program.

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