

US House rejects sex-selection abortion ban

31 May 2012, by JIM ABRAMS

(AP) - The House on Thursday fell short in an effort to ban abortions based on the sex of the fetus as Republicans and Democrats made an election-year appeal for women's votes.

The legislation would have made it a federal crime to perform or force a woman to undergo a sex-based abortion, a practice most common in some Asian countries where families wanting sons abort female fetuses

The bill had little chance of becoming law. The Democratic-controlled Senate would likely have ignored it, and the House brought it up under a procedure requiring a two-thirds majority for passage. The vote was 246-168 - 30 votes short of that majority. Twenty Democrats voted for it, while seven Republicans opposed it.

It was a rare social issue to reach the House floor in a year when the economy has dominated the political conversation, and Republicans, besieged by Democratic claims that they are waging a war on women, struck back by trying to depict the vote as a women's rights issue.

"It is violence against women," said Rep. Chris Smith, a Republican, of abortions of female fetuses. "This is the real war on women."

The White House, most Democrats, abortion rights groups and some Asian-American organizations opposed the bill, saying it could lead to racial profiling of Asian-American women and subject doctors who do not report suspected sex-selection abortions to criminal charges.

"The administration opposes gender discrimination in all forms, but the end result of this legislation would be to subject doctors to criminal prosecution if they fail to determine the motivations behind a very personal and private decision," White House spokeswoman Jamie Smith said in a statement. "The government should not intrude in medical decisions or private family matters in this way."

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The bill's author, Rep. Trent Franks, a Republican, said before the vote that regardless of the outcome, the point would be made. "When people vote on this, the world will know where they really stand."

Rep. Steny Hoyer, the House's No. 2 Democrat, said he thought the bill was introduced because "somebody decided politically that this was a difficult place to put people in."

The legislation would have made it a federal offense, subject to up to five years in prison, to perform, solicit funds for or coerce a woman into having a sex-selection abortion. Bringing a woman into the country to obtain such an abortion would also be punishable by up to five years in prison.

While doctors would not have an affirmative responsibility to ask a woman her motivations for an [abortion](#), health workers could be imprisoned for up to a year for not reporting known or suspected violations of the ban on sex-based abortions.

An earlier version of the bill also made it illegal to abort a fetus based on race.

Franks and others say there is evidence of sex-selection abortions in the United States among certain ethnic groups from countries where there is a traditional preference for sons. The bill notes that while the United States has no federal law against such abortions, countries such as India and China, where the practice has contributed to lopsided boy-girl ratios, have enacted bans on the practice.

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