

Senate amendment restores ban on taxpayer-funded abortions

August 12, 2021

WASHINGTON (BP)—A Southern Baptist senator introduced an amendment that reinstates a ban on the use of federal funds to pay for abortions.

During consideration of a budget resolution, senators approved in a 50-49 vote the amendment by Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla.

In addition to barring federal funds from being used to pay for abortions, the amendment also blocks funding for government programs that discriminate against individual health care professionals or institutions that object to abortion.

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W. Va., provided the deciding vote for the measure. He joined all the Republicans who were present in the evenly divided chamber in support of Lankford's amendment. Manchin joined his Democratic colleagues to approve the amended, \$3.5 trillion budget plan by a single vote.

Southern Baptist public policy specialist Chelsea Sobolik described Lankford's effort as "certainly helpful for the pro-life cause."

"As lawmakers craft legislation, they should start from a foundation that protects life—something that has been a source of bipartisan agreement for decades," said Sobolik, acting public policy director of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "This amendment restores that policy in this budget process."

The ERLC urges the House of Representatives "to follow the Senate's lead

and ensure these important pro-life riders are part of the budget resolution,” she said.

In a July 30 letter, the ERLC had urged Senate leaders to restore long-standing, pro-life policies removed from spending bills by the House. The House had approved appropriations bills in late July that eliminated the Hyde Amendment and other measures that either prohibit federal funding of abortion or, as in the case of the Weldon Amendment, protect the conscience rights of pro-life health care workers and institutions.

Retains protections of Hyde and Weldon amendments

The Hyde Amendment has barred federal funds in Medicaid and other programs from paying for abortions in every year since 1976. The Weldon Amendment has prohibited since 2004 government discrimination against pro-life health care providers and insurance plans.

Messengers to the 2021 Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in June approved a resolution that denounced any attempt to rescind the Hyde Amendment and urged the retention of all pro-life “riders,” which must be approved each year in spending bills.

In the budget reconciliation process, only a majority is required for passage, rather than the normal requirement of 60 votes to invoke cloture and halt a filibuster. The Senate-passed resolution provides guidance for its committees in writing the actual budget bill for fiscal year 2022.

In a speech on the Senate floor before the vote, Lankford said his amendment would be consistent with the Hyde Amendment. Hyde “reflects a decades-long consensus that millions of Americans who profoundly are opposed to abortion should not be forced to pay for the taking of human

lives of children or incentivize it with their taxpayer dollars,” he said.

“Millions of Americans of faith and of no faith know that the only difference between a child in the womb and outside the womb is time,” he said. “Just because they are smaller people doesn’t mean they should be any less protected by law.”

Lankford’s amendment was one of more than 40 such measures considered during a lengthy “vote-a-rama,” as it is known, that did not conclude until nearly 4 a.m. EDT on Aug. 11. Republican Sen. Mike Rounds of South Dakota was absent because of a medical need in his family.