

Take Action!

Let's Stop the Attack on Reproductive Freedom by MARCIA J. WEISS

A woman's right to abortion is being continuously eroded by state legislatures across the United States and by the U.S. Congress. Two of the more harmful pieces of legislation are discussed below. Subsequent articles in *Na'amat Woman* will address other developments in the abortion debate and how we can protect women's reproductive rights.

On May 13, 2015, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill by a vote of 242 to 184 banning abortions after 20 weeks. The so-called Pain-Capable Child Protection Act (H.R. 36) aims to prohibit doctors from performing abortions after 20 weeks' gestation except in cases of rape, incest or danger to the mother's life. There is no exception for severe fetal anomalies, and the bill requires the physician to try to save the fetus if there is any chance that it could survive outside the womb.

Republicans claim that the 20-week limit is based on the (undocumented) theory that a fetus can feel pain at that point in its development. Abortions after 20 weeks are rare, accounting for only about 1 percent of all abortions. The bill, however, would hurt women who discover severe medical problems late into their pregnancies, making them wait until these conditions become life threatening before legally obtaining an abortion.

Every 2016 GOP presidential candidate has endorsed the bill and 11 state legislatures have already passed similar bills into law. In the first three months of 2015, more than 300 bills restricting access to abortion have been introduced in state legislatures. Anti-abortion activists

hope that this bill will be their opening to challenging and ultimately overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 Supreme Court decision that the Constitution, on the basis of the right to privacy, gives women an unrestricted right to abortion during the first three months of pregnancy.

TAKE ACTION! Urge your state legislators and U.S. senators to block the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act and work to rescind existing laws at the state level. Women should be able to make their own medical decisions, free of legislative control based on an unproven theory of fetal development.

A second piece of legislation putting women's health and rights at risk is the reauthorization of the Hyde Amendment. Not a permanent law, the amendment forbids the use of federal funds for abortion, except in cases of life-endangerment, incest or rape. First implemented in 1977, it has guided public funding for abortions under the joint federal-state Medicaid programs for low-income women. Under the Hyde Amendment, federal Medicaid coverage cannot extend to abortion even when a woman's health is at risk and her doctor recommends she obtain an abortion to preserve her health. The amendment has been reauthorized every year by Congress as part of budget appropriations for the Department of Health and Human Services. States can go beyond the Hyde Amendment and cover medically necessary abortions with state funds, but only 17 do so. According to Planned Parenthood, more than 12.5 million women, age 19 to 64, depend on Medicaid.

The Hyde Amendment creates

economic barriers and health concerns for low-income women. Often these women have had to delay obtaining an abortion because they lack the money. Women unable to pay for an abortion may resort to self-inducing a miscarriage or seeking unsafe and illegal abortions. Others may be forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term, pushing them further into poverty. Particularly burdened are women of color, who have a greater likelihood to experience unintended pregnancy. Federal abortion restrictions also extend to more than 20 million women receiving government health insurance, such as women serving in the military and the Peace Corps and women prisoners.

Since Hyde Amendment restrictions are renewed annually, we have the opportunity to eliminate them. A woman's right to an abortion is a private medical decision, one that women have relied on for 40 years. Attempts by state and federal politicians to intrude into women's lives by abridging that right constitute a dangerous overstepping that we cannot tolerate. As the United States Supreme Court has said, "The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives."

TAKE ACTION! Urge your legislators to refuse to reenact the Hyde Amendment. Protect women with the coverage needed to seek a safe, legal abortion.

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Thank Your Legislators for Taking Action on Human Trafficking

Good news! On May 19, the House of Representatives passed the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (S. 178). This crucial legislation will strengthen the child welfare system; expand funding for victim services; mandate specialized training programs; increase penalties for traffickers; outlaw trafficking-related publicity or advertisements and more. It will now go to President Obama to be signed into law.

Every day, men, women and children are forced, defrauded and coerced into labor or sexual exploitation. Trafficking and its related crimes not only harm the women involved. They also undermine the social, political and economic fabric of the nations where they occur by devaluing individuals, demeaning women and increasing violence and crime. It is estimated that 300,000 minors are at risk of becoming victims of trafficking in the United States each year.

Thank your legislators for taking action to support victims of human trafficking!