

Abortion ruling sparks new legislation

State lawmakers consider bill to allow schools option of teaching abstinence-only curriculum

Alyson Raletz

State House Reporter

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo - A partial-birth abortion ban upheld last week in the U.S. Supreme Court turned heads locally and in Jefferson City.

Experts believe the decision could move state legislators to call for stricter abortion laws.

Missouri's partial-birth ban is tied up in court. That, paired with a possible challenge to Roe v. Wade in the future, should keep abortion initiatives at bay in the state Legislature, said Senate Majority Floor Leader Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph.

However, a St. Joseph abortion opponent said he hopes the national decision will help lead to new abortion restrictions in Missouri.

"Any time you have a national court making a ruling in favor of life, ... it will have significant implications at the state level," said Nathan Lewis, a campus minister at Bishop LeBlond High School and organizer for this year's March for Life in Washington.

While not needed in light of the court proceedings, Democratic Caucus Chair Rep. Ed Wildberger, D-St. Joseph, said he suspects

a flurry of abortion bills in the 2008 legislative session. He predicts legislators could use the hot-button issue to gain the spotlight in the coming election year.

Abortion legislation already came up last week in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, but it steers clear of the partial-birth procedure and focuses on prevention.

The bills would stop abortion providers, including Planned Parenthood, from distributing information for sex education classes. The representative who sponsored the House bill cited fears of sex education resulting in more abortions.

Schools also would have a choice of whether to teach an abstinence-only curriculum under the proposed legislation. The House gave first-round approval to the legislation, while the Senate has yet to take a vote.

Rep. Dr. Rob Schaaf, Rep. Mike Thomson, R-Maryville, and Rep. John Quinn, R-Chillicothe, were the only regional legislators to support the bill.

"I vote to limit abortions whenever I can because I believe they are the moral equivalent of murder," said Dr. Schaaf, R-St. Joseph.

Mr. Lewis said he also expects the Supreme Court decision to help move Dr. Schaaf's bill that would stop the state from purchasing vaccines derived from aborted fetal tissue.

"It's a step in the right direction," Mr. Lewis said.