

Assembly Republicans send abortion bills to Evers

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Dem Rep. Lisa Subeck slammed Republicans today for approving a series of new abortion restrictions, saying they were doing “absolutely nothing to improve the lives or health of women in our state.”

But Freshman GOP Rep. William Penterman countered human life needs to be protected at any stage because it is a naturally and constitutionally protected right. He added lawmakers should come together on the issue because that right is shared by all people.

The bills include banning abortions if they’re sought due to the sex or race of the fetus or diagnosis of potential disability, along with requiring health professionals to provide life-saving measures if an infant survived an abortion attempt.

The legislation is now headed to Gov. Tony Evers, who vetoed similar bills two years ago and is expected to do so again.

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“Individually our hearts beat to keep us alive,” Penterman, R-Columbus said. “But together when we do the right thing, and when we stand up for others, especially for those who cannot stand up for themselves, we give others a chance to live, too.”

Subeck, D-Madison, said the bills aim to chip away at women’s ability to make their own decisions about their reproductive health. Subeck added “A woman cannot truly be free unless she can make decisions” relating to her reproductive health, such as having an abortion. She also said the bills are nothing more than a push to appease the most extreme sects of the GOP voting base.

“In this case, it’s pure political theater,” she said. “Stop putting the health care of

women and children in the middle of your political game.”

GOP Rep. Chuck Wichgers voted against four of the five bills on today’s calendar, arguing they weren’t stringent enough.

That includes SB 503, which would prohibit the Department of Health Services from certifying a provider under the Medical Assistance program if it provides abortion services or is affiliated with someone who does, except in certain circumstances.

Wichgers, R-Muskego, said he’s against SB 503 because it provides exceptions on abortion bans for pregnancies that create a life threat to the mothers or if the pregnancy results from rape or incest.

The bill cleared the chamber 55-38 with Rep. Tim Ramthun, R-Campbellsport, joining Wichgers and Dems in opposition.

The bills that passed include:

*SB 16, which would create a felony penalty for medical professionals who fail to take live-saving measures for an infant that survives an abortion attempt. It cleared 55-38 with Wichgers and Rep. Janel Brandtjen, R-Menomonee Falls, joining Dems in voting no. In committee, Wichgers objected to a provision that would prevent the mother of the child from being prosecuted.

*SB 591, which would require women who receive abortion pills to be informed they may be able to continue their pregnancies after taking the first of two doses needed to complete the chemical procedure. The legislation would require women to be told after taking the first pill that time was a factor and they would need to contact a health professional quickly to attempt counteracting the effects of the first drug. It cleared 55-39 with Ramthun and Wichgers joining Dems in opposition.

*SB 593, which would ban abortions due to the fetus’ race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, or because it had been diagnosed with a congenital disability or has a potential diagnosis of Down syndrome. It would allow a party to seek damages if a doctor performed an abortion due to any of those factors. Though it would ban abortions if the fetus has been diagnosed with Down syndrome or other congenital disability, it includes an exception for a “life-limiting fetal anomaly” that is incompatible with sustaining life after birth. It cleared 55-39 with Ramthun and Wichgers joining Dems in opposition.

Meanwhile, it was a straight party-line vote on SB 592, which would require expectant parents be given educational materials if they receive a positive test for a congenital condition.

During floor debate, Rep. Lee Snodgrass, D-Appleton, said nobody should be weighing in on abortion regulations unless they have a uterus.

“The bottom line regarding this bill and all those we will vote on today is that no matter the reason, the time or the circumstance behind the decision to have an abortion, the underlying basic right to maintain control over one’s body is paramount,” she said. “When you legislate private reproductive decisions, you’re wading into dangerous territory.”

Majority Leader Jim Steineke said what proponents call the “born alive act” would help give those babies a better chance at a quality life afterward.

While current law allows doctors to provide life saving measures to those babies if the parents consent, Steineke said SB 16 would make sure those babies receive the care they need.

“This is something we’re seeking to clarify, and if you support the law as it’s written now, I can’t understand why you wouldn’t support this,” he said.