

House Rejects Bill to Ban Sex-Selective Abortions

WASHINGTON — The House on Thursday rejected a measure that sought to impose fines and prison terms on doctors who perform abortions on women who are trying to select the gender of their offspring — a practice known as sex-selective abortion.

The legislation, which required two-thirds support to win passage under the fast-track procedure used to bring it to the floor, fell short on a vote of 246 to 168. Republicans did not anticipate that the legislation would pass, but saw it as an opportunity to force Democrats to vote on an issue with appeal among conservatives.

“Today’s vote is a stunning declaration by supporters of abortion that they oppose any restrictions on abortion,” said Representative John Fleming, Republican of Louisiana.

Democrats accused Republicans of contriving a vote on legislation to address a problem that does not exist.

“I don’t support abortion for gender selection,” said Representative Diana DeGette, Democrat of Colorado and an opponent of the legislation. “I don’t know anyone who does. Maybe that’s because there is no problem in this country of abortion for gender selection.”

Abortion-rights advocates, while pleased with the outcome, slammed Representative Trent Franks, Republican of Arizona, for pushing forward with his bill, known as the Prenatal Nondiscrimination Act. “Many of the bill’s supporters have rejected equal pay for women and have tried to slash funding for programs that serve women and children,” said Nancy Keenan, president of Nara Pro-Choice America.

While there does not appear to be an extensive network of women seeking abortions in order to manage the race or gender makeup of their families, Mallory Quigley, a spokeswoman for the Susan B. Anthony List, an anti-abortion group, [cited](#) three [studies](#) that she said [documented](#) the use of sex-selective abortion, largely among a small number of women from various immigrant groups. “We’re confident there will be future votes and soon, on the issue,” Ms. Quigley said.

The abortion vote was just one issue on which the two parties engaged in political maneuvering on Thursday. Republicans and Democrats also continued to spar over how to deal with an impending increase in some [student loan](#) rates at the end of June. Facing an

impasse, Congressional Republicans sent a letter to the White House offering some suggestions for how to pay for an extended lower loan rate.

The letter was sent a few hours after Speaker John. A. Boehner of Ohio told fellow Republicans that he believed that the rate on subsidized undergraduate loans — currently set at 3.4 percent — would most likely revert to 6.8 percent on July 1 because he was not sure the House and Senate could come to terms. Mr. Boehner has called the controversy over the potential increase “phony.”

This set off a mini-firestorm among Democrats. “Today, Speaker Boehner confirmed to his conference what was already obvious,” said Representative Nancy Pelosi of California, the Democratic leader.

In April, the House passed a bill that would freeze the one-year rates at a cost of \$5.9 billion by stripping billions from a prevention program within the [health care law](#), something Democrats have said they would not accept. Many Republicans, who do not favor extending the rates, were not interested in passing the bill at all; 13 Democrats, largely moderates, pushed it to passage, when 30 Republicans voted against it.

Senate Democrats failed to clear a procedural vote on their own student loan bill, which would have paid for the extension with a change to a law that allows some wealthy taxpayers to avoid paying [Social Security](#) and [Medicare](#) taxes by classifying their pay as dividends, not cash income.

On Thursday, Republican leaders from both chambers sent a letter to President Obama offering some new ideas for paying for the extension, culled in part from his own budget.

One would increase current employee contributions to the Civil Service Retirement System and the Federal Employees Retirement System. Another would limit the in-school interest subsidies for subsidized Stafford loans. Republicans also proposed adjusting taxes for [Medicaid](#) providers and taking steps to prevent state and local government workers from double dipping on pensions.

All of those ideas are less controversial than the one offered in the original House bill, but each has its detractors. The fight over the student loan bill mirrors a similar skirmish last year over the extension of a [payroll tax](#) holiday for workers, in which each party is trying to claim the title of best friend to the middle class.

The White House did not reject the ideas out of hand. “The president will work with members of both parties to prevent the interest rate from doubling,” said Matthew Lehrich, a White House spokesman, “because he understands that seven million American college students and their families don’t think that an average \$1,000 increase on the typical college student’s debt load is ‘phony.’ ”