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### **Future of Heartbeat Bill Uncertain as Niehaus Suspends Hearings**

Senate President Tom Niehaus (R-New Richmond) halted further hearings on the anti-abortion "heartbeat bill" Wednesday, citing recent changes suggested by bill supporters.

"Supporters of the bill delivered more than 20 amendments on Wednesday, asking us to make changes after months of deliberation in both the House and Senate," Niehaus said in a statement. "These 11th-hour revisions only serve to create more uncertainty about a very contentious issue. We've now heard hours of testimony that indicate a sharp disagreement within the pro-life community over the direction of this bill, and I believe our members need additional time to weigh the arguments. Therefore, I have asked the committee chairman to suspend hearings on the bill so we can consider the new amendments and determine the best course of action."

Speaking to reporters at Wednesday's Senate session, Niehaus labeled "outrageous" bill supporters' decision to submit changes after months of "berating" the Senate for not passing the bill.

"That just underscores the complexity and divisiveness of this bill," he said.

But Janet Porter of Faith2Action, a driving force behind HB125 (Wachtmann), said changes were largely technical and designed to answer concerns raised by senators. She said they'd handed off the suggestions to lawmakers last week.

"There's really no need for any feather ruffling. What it is was what the senators suggested," Porter said minutes after the conclusion of a third hearing on the bill, when Niehaus' decision was announced.

"His word was that there will be a vote this year. As president of the Senate, he's free to call any session and any hearing he would like, and I hope that he will do so to keep his word," Porter said.

Sen. Scott Oelslager (R-Canton), chairman of the Senate Health, Human Services and Aging Committee, put the lid on rumors of a vote at the outset of Wednesday's hearing, saying he's taking all his cues on the bill from Niehaus.

Marshal Pitchford, chairman of the Ohio Right to Life Board, released a statement praising Niehaus' decision.

"Ohio Right to Life commends Senate President Tom Niehaus' call for unity within Ohio's pro-life movement. We look forward to working with the supporters of HB125 to identify a reasonable compromise. The historic number of pro-life measures enacted in 2011 demonstrates that both the Ohio Senate and Ohio House of Representatives stand ready to promote a culture of life in our great state," Pitchford said.

Porter was among several people who spoke during Wednesday's hearing. She noted the course of previously passed abortion restrictions that were thought to run afoul of U.S. Supreme Court precedent but ultimately ended up in law.

"Every single law we have passed has been challenged. Every single argument given, I have heard before on other bills. Informed consent, parental consent and partial-birth abortion bans were all once called unconstitutional. What did we do? We kept knocking and we got every single one of them," Porter said.

Sen. Shirley Smith (D-Cleveland) asked Porter to explain the division between her organization and Ohio Right to Life, which doesn't support the bill, citing fear of court challenges. Porter said some anti-abortion advocates have gotten so used to seeing incremental change they've adopted the mindset that big steps are impossible.

"At the marches, people hold signs that say 'stop abortion now,' not 'regulate abortion now,'" Porter said.

She said that, while no one can say with certainty that U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy will provide the crucial vote for further abortion restrictions, there's "absolutely no evidence" Kennedy would alternately swing in the other direction and join a ruling friendlier to abortion-rights advocates.

Other testimony Wednesday was split between supporters and opponents.

Julie Busby, a former Ohio Right to Life board member, recalled her feelings during her pregnancy with her youngest son, Hawke, during which she found out her husband was cheating on her. She said she was also opposed to abortion then but wished for a miscarriage and felt "the death of my child was the answer to my problems." But she said seeing him after delivery changed her life and led her to her life's work of starting a nonprofit to reconcile fathers to their children. She asked senators to pass the bill "so that other women who find themselves in my predicament can make a connection with their child through listening to its heartbeat and found out that you can take your greatest pain and turn it into your greatest passion."

Corey Shankleton, a pastor and director of TNR Uprising Ministries who supports the bill, said lawmakers should cut through the lengthy and complicated

testimony about court precedent and the intricacies of legal challenges and instead think about what their internal moral compass tells them is right.

"Some have said we should take small incremental steps. I wonder what those who will succumb to the horror of abortion today would say to that. Are than an acceptable casualty for strategy's sake?" Shankleton said.

David Law, a Columbus man, read a list of Bible verses he said are pro-life.

Molly Brand of Oberlin read the anonymous testimony of a woman who described her decision to terminate her pregnancy when tests revealed her baby had the same rare condition that had caused the death of her first child, a daughter, at age 17 months. She said lawmakers shouldn't inject themselves into those kinds of decisions.

Charlotte Miller of Columbus recalled seeing her father beat her pregnant mother, which landed her mother in the hospital, where she delivered a baby by C-section but was denied her request to have a tubal ligation before being sewn back up. She said her mother confided to her late in life that failure to plan her pregnancies was one of her biggest regrets, and Miller said lawmakers should not act to restrict women's access to competent medical care.  
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