

Poll: Utahns say state doesn't need more restrictions on abortion

By Lisa Riley Roche, KSL

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SALT LAKE CITY — As many as 80% of Utahns say the state doesn't need new restrictions on abortions, according to results released Monday from a new poll for the Planned Parenthood Association of Utah, the Alliance for a Better Utah and the ACLU of Utah.

Several abortion-related bills are being considered by the Utah Legislature, including SB174, which was introduced Monday from Sen.

Dan McCay, R-Riverton, that contingent on a court ruling permitting a ban, would allow abortion only in cases of rape, incest or if the mother faces a "serious risk of substantial and irreversible impairment of major bodily function" or death.

In SB67, from Sen. Curt Bramble, R-Provo, medical providers would have to bury or cremate fetal remains and give a woman who'd had a miscarriage or an abortion the option of doing the same herself, and HB364, from Rep. Stephen Christiansen, R-West Jordan, would mandate an ultrasound before an abortion.

"These bills are an attack on the agency and well-being of Utah," Karrie Galloway, Planned Parenthood Association of Utah president and CEO, said at a Capitol news conference called to announce the poll results. "They're not what Utahns want. Our Legislature must do better, and if they don't, they must be voted out."

Galloway said "people can be trusted to make decisions about their lives, their bodies, their families. And the last thing they need is politicians interfering in personal medical decisions." She said the sponsors of the abortion legislation "are listening to a small minority."

McCay said he's hopeful the U.S. Supreme Court will "undo what I think was a political decision," Roe v. Wade, the 1973 ruling legalizing abortion. "It's appropriate for us to ask ourselves, 'Have we moved society far enough along and advanced ourselves that an abortion — the killing of our young — isn't necessarily humane anymore?'"

He said his new bill is contingent on court action that "would put the states in a position of making a decision about how each state wanted to handle abortion. It would put Utah on record as knowing that that's where we would be if it was ever overruled."



Senate President Stuart Adams, R-Layton, said McCay's bill "actually puts us in a good spot if there's a change by the Supreme Court. But if there's no change by the Supreme Court, it doesn't actually do anything. Really, it just actually allows us to mirror what the Supreme Court says."

McCay, asked if he believes most Utahns agree with the ban on abortion that his bill would impose if allowed by the courts, said, "That question is to be decided by their elected senator and representative." He said he's "received widespread support from constituents in my district."

The "Utah Reproductive Rights Survey" was conducted by Dan Jones & Associates of 793 adult Utahns across the state Jan. 23-Feb. 9 with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.48 percentage points, according to information provided by the abortion-rights organizations behind it.

The poll initially asked whether Utahns want to see the state's laws on abortion become more strict, less strict or remain the same, and 30% wanted stricter laws while 35% said the laws should remain the same and 35% said the laws should be less strict.

But when told about a half-dozen restrictions already in place, including a 72-hour waiting period and state-directed counseling, only 16% of Utahns said there needs to be more restrictions on abortions and 4% said they didn't know, compared to 80% who said no more restrictions are needed.

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—Marina Lowe, legislative and policy counsel for the ACLU of Utah

Marina Lowe, legislative and policy counsel for the ACLU of Utah, said it's become "an almost annual tradition of increasing the restrictions on abortion" by state lawmakers. She said in the last 45 years, they have passed 30 new such restrictions.

"As a state, we have already placed so many obstacles in the path of women when it comes to exercising reproductive freedom. Our lawmakers should heed their constituents," Lowe said, and focus "on efforts to improve the health and well-being of Utahns rather than the pursuit of additional mean-spirited abortion restrictions."

The same poll also found that a majority of Utahns, 52%, would vote to uphold Roe v. Wade if they had the opportunity, while 38% said they would vote to repeal. It also found that a majority of Utahns support sex education in schools and state-funded reproductive health services for low-income Utahns, including birth control and family planning.

Lauren Simpson, policy director for the Alliance for a Better Utah, said the results should prompt Utahns to contact their lawmakers to make sure they're "listening to what the majority of Utahns want. And I also think this is an invitation for lawmakers who may have been on the fence" on these issues.

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