



Photo by Kenneth Lambert/The Washington Times

Republicans from both houses tout the Child Custody Protection Act affirming parental consent for abortions.

GOP seeks to outlaw evading parental consent for abortion

By Sean Scully
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Congressional Republicans moved to consolidate their conservative voter base yesterday, hosting a high-profile kickoff for a bill to strengthen state parental-consent abortion laws nationwide.

More than a dozen leaders from both chambers yesterday turned out to support the Child Custody Protection Act, which makes it a federal crime to circumvent a state's parental-consent laws by transporting a girl under 18 across state lines to get an abortion.

"It's about protecting our children from terror and abuse and strangers who have their own interests at heart and callous disregard for the child," House Majority Leader Dick Armey, Texas Republican, said.

"Protecting parental rights and the integrity of the family should be a bipartisan issue," Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, Mississippi Republican, said.

The bill was introduced with little fanfare in April, but the GOP leaders staged a major press event yesterday, only five days after a closed-door meeting with conservative leaders. Those leaders, including conservative radio commentator James Dobson, were

unhappy with the Washington leadership, saying the Republicans had abandoned issues important to religious conservatives.

Mr. Dobson had threatened to leave the Republican Party, and other conservatives groups warned darkly of a future split in GOP ranks.

Fearing a conservative backlash in November's congressional election, Republican leaders promised Friday to champion conservative issues in the remaining months of this session.

Republican leaders insist they had planned to address conservative concerns anyway, even before Friday's meetings. But support for the parental-consent bill appears to be the first effort to make good on that vow.

Mr. Lott said he expects to send the bill to the president by the summer.

Sponsors of the bill say abortion rights activists and other adults are systematically evading parental-consent laws in 22 states by driving young women to abortion clinics in states that do not have such laws.

Republican leaders also said the law is aimed at stopping older men from having sexual relations with teen-age girls, then trying to cover up their deeds by having the girls

get abortions out of state.

"By passing the Child Custody Protection Act, we, the Congress, and the American people will take a clear stand against the twisted notion that the United States Constitution confers a 'right' upon strangers to parent our children," said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Florida Republican and sponsor of the House bill.

But abortion-rights groups accused the Republicans of playing politics.

"Anti-choice leaders in Congress showed us once again that they would rather provoke a divisive battle over abortion to score political points than work with us to adopt policies that help all Americans make responsible choices about parenthood," Gloria Feldt, president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, said in a press release.

She said some girls are unable or unwilling to get consent from parents, especially in abusive households.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin G. Hatch, Utah Republican, dismissed such arguments. "I am sure no teen-ager is comfortable telling their parents this type of news," he said, "but that's no rationale for not enforcing state laws."