

Rightgrrl Karen Brauer And the Pharmacist's Conscience Clause - In The News

Kentucky Debates 'Conscience' Bill for Anti-Abortion Pharmacists

In the News
Guestbook
About Karen
Pharmacist's Rant
Kmart?
Library
Rightgrrl Home

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Fox News

FRANKFORT, Ky. — A "conscience" bill to protect pharmacists who refuse to fill prescriptions for abortion drugs advanced toward the Kentucky Senate on Thursday. A physician can refuse on moral grounds to perform an abortion. A pharmacist should have an equal right, Sen. Elizabeth Tori, the bill sponsor, said in testimony to the Senate Health and Welfare Committee. She said the bill was aimed primarily at pharmacists who are employees, not owners, of a pharmacy. They could not be fired or otherwise punished for refusing to fill an abortion prescription if they had stated a conscientious objection. "It simply balances conscience with authority," Tori, R-Radcliff, said. The bill had one opponent on the committee -- Democratic Sen. Joey Pendleton of Hopkinsville, who said people in rural areas might not have a second pharmacist to fall back on. The only real debate was between some committee members and a retired Methodist clergyman, the Rev. Gilbert Schroerlucke of Louisville, who said a pharmacist was "obligated to respond to a patient's needs." "Can one person's conscience be allowed to control free trade and the rights of others?" Schroerlucke said. He then attempted to draw historical parallels that irked some senators. Schroerlucke said Hitler's extermination of Jews, George Wallace's defense of segregation and Pope John Paul II's denial of a woman's "basic human right" to be a pastor all were matters of conscience. Schroerlucke also said pharmacists who object to filling abortion prescriptions should find another line of work, prompting Sen. Charlie Borders, R-Russell, to suggest that Schroerlucke do the same. Sen. Dick Roeding, himself a pharmacist and former lobbyist for pharmaceutical companies, told Schroerlucke he had at times refused to fill prescriptions in his own practice. Tori's bill originally would have forbidden a pharmacist to be denied a promotion. One of her supporters, Sen. David Karem of Louisville, persuaded her to remove it, lest it create a class of plaintiffs. "It sets up someone who may never have been pro-life, and now they're pro-life because they didn't get promoted," Karen said.