

MEMORANDUM

TO: PLANNED PARENTHOOD FEDERATION OF AMERICA
FROM: GEOFF GARIN AND MOLLY O'ROURKE
DATE: AUGUST 28, 2013
RE: A DEEPER LOOK AT VOTERS' OPINIONS ON 20-WEEK ABORTION BANS

Our new survey of 1,011 registered voters provides a deeper and more realistic assessment of Americans' attitudes about proposals to ban abortion at 20 weeks than is available through other public polls. Unlike other surveys, we measure voters' considered opinions about these 20-week bans by asking about the specific circumstances in which abortions should and should not be allowed at the 20th week of a woman's pregnancy, and find that *there is broad consensus that women should have access to abortion after 20 weeks under several key circumstances. We tested voters' views about these circumstances because medical groups say they are the common reasons women need access to abortion after 20 weeks – and because abortion in these circumstances would be illegal under bans passed by some states and by the U.S. House of Representatives.*

For example:

- Sixty-six percent (66%) of all voters say abortions should be legal after 20 weeks if a woman's doctor determines that the woman would suffer serious, long-lasting health problems if she carried the pregnancy to term;
- Sixty-one percent (61%) of all voters say abortions should be legal after 20 weeks if a woman's doctor determines that the fetus is not yet viable and the woman and her family determine that her health and personal circumstances are such that she should not continue her pregnancy; and
- Sixty-one percent (61%) of all voters say abortions should be legal after 20 weeks if a pregnancy resulted from rape or incest.

Once voters consider the range of circumstances in which abortions would be made illegal under most 20-week abortion ban proposals, a majority of Americans oppose them. *Indeed, the margins in opposition to these bans are so significant that we think it is very likely that they would be voted down in a popular referendum in virtually any state of the county, after people have had a chance to learn about the real-world consequences of them.*

Moreover, our survey shows that the overwhelming majority of voters say this is the wrong issue for Congress and state legislators to be spending time on (including a strong 62% majority of Republican voters). When informed that the Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation that would allow abortions after 20 weeks only when the life of the mother is at risk and in cases of

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rape and incest reported to police within 24 hours, about three in five (59%) voters say this makes them feel the Republicans are out of step with their own views and priorities.

A. There are many circumstances under which most Americans believe abortions at 20 weeks should be legal, circumstances that are not considered in the abortion bans that have been passed by some states and the House of Representatives.

In fact, in at least four common circumstances there is broad consensus among registered voters that abortion should remain legal beyond 20 weeks:

In the following situation, should it should be legal or illegal for a woman to have an abortion after 20 weeks?			
	<u>Legal</u> %	<u>Illegal</u> %	Margin Of Support For Abortion <u>Remaining Legal</u> %
Woman would suffer serious long-term health problems if pregnancy is carried to term	66	23	+43
Fetus is not viable and personal/health circumstances are such that she shouldn't continue pregnancy	61	28	+33
Pregnancy is a result of rape or incest	61	30	+31
The fetus has severe abnormalities that would cause fetal death or extreme disability	58	31	+27

While Democrats and independents express even more sizable levels of support for abortion remaining legal later in pregnancy in each of these four circumstances, even Republican voters believe that HR1797 is too restrictive in not recognizing key circumstances. More than half (55%) of Republican voters believe that it should be legal for a woman to have an abortion after 20 weeks if the woman would suffer long-term health problems if the pregnancy were carried to term. Republican voters remain divided almost equally on the other three circumstances.

B. By double-digit margins, Americans oppose 20-week abortion bans when they understand the full range of circumstances in which abortions would be prohibited.

By a 20-point margin (54% to 34%), voters oppose a ban that would make an exception only for the life of the woman after 20 weeks (without a health exception). But “amending” this restriction to allow for other circumstances does not alter voters’ objections to such bans. For example, by a similarly strong 17-point margin (53% to 36%), voters also oppose a ban that allows exceptions for both the life of the woman and limited cases involving her health.

Further, voters are outspoken in their view that abortions should be allowed after the twentieth week of pregnancy in cases of severe fetal abnormalities, especially when they are reminded that abortions are very rare at this stage in pregnancy and that fetal abnormalities are often involved in the instances. With this context, by a 27-point margin, 60% to 33%, voters say that abortion should be permitted in these circumstances.

C. There is a broad consensus that state legislatures and Congress should not be devoting time to the issue of 20-week abortion bans.

By an overwhelming 71% to 25%, voters say that these types of abortion bans are the wrong issue for Congress to be spending time on. In fact, voters are so adamant they do not want Congress debating this issue that a majority of voters across the partisan spectrum agree, including 62% of Republicans and 70% of Southerners, as well as voters in every other region of the country. Even a majority of voters who traditionally are characterized as “pro-life” (those who say abortion should be illegal in all or most circumstances) do not think this should be a focus for Congress. Similarly, by an unequivocal 36-point margin (65% to 29%), voters do not want their state legislature to be involved in this issue, a consensus that includes a majority of Republicans (52%).

More than three in five (63%) voters say it is very convincing that “*instead of focusing on divisive issues like this one, our elected officials should be spending their time on the country's priorities, like improving the economy and reducing the deficit.*” This robust sentiment holds up across party lines, with a 54% majority of Republicans saying it is very convincing, in addition to a 53% majority of voters who say abortion should be illegal in most circumstances.

Nearly all public opinion polls show broad disapproval overall for the House Republicans, and their recent actions on a 20-week ban deepen those perceptions as the public learns about it. After the bill is described as follows, a strong majority (59%) of voters say it makes them think the Republican majority in the House of Representatives is out of step with their views and priorities (59%), including half

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(50%) of independents and more than half (58%) of Republicans who do not identify as extremely conservative:

The Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill that would ban all abortions after 20 weeks, except to save the life of the woman. The Republicans' bill would ban abortions after 20 weeks in cases involving several fetal abnormalities, in cases when there is a serious health risk to the woman, and in cases of rape and incest unless the woman reported the attack to the police within 24 hours.

D. Americans believe that this type of abortion ban goes too far in interfering in the doctor-patient relationship, and they oppose making it a crime for a doctor to perform an abortion after 20-weeks when he or she determines there is a serious risk to the woman's health.

About three in five (59%) voters agree that blanket abortion bans represent interference in a woman's relationship with her doctor; fewer than one in three (31%) disagree. More Republican voters agree than disagree that these bans go too far in hindering the doctor-patient relationship.

Voters also express strong objections to key provisions of HR1797 and many state bans. Specifically, more than two-thirds (67%) say it should not be a crime for a doctor to perform an abortion after 20 weeks if it is necessary to protect the woman's health or her ability to become pregnant again in the future. In fact, there is such broad consensus on this point that a majority of Republican voters (52%), Southerners (62%), and voters who generally think abortion should be illegal in most cases (53%) agree that it should not be a crime.