

Both sides bracing for abortion battle

House Bill 1572 defines fertilized egg as a human being

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By: [Janell Cole](#) , INFORUM



R-Minot, sponsor of bill

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BISMARCK – The sponsor of an abortion bill that passed the North Dakota House on Tuesday said he is already aware of several groups around the country that will help defend the state if it is taken to court because of the law.

House Bill 1572 passed on a 51-41 vote and now goes to the Senate. It defines a fertilized egg as a human being.

Though its sponsor, Rep. Dan Ruby, R-Minot, must wait for it to pass the Senate and be signed by the governor in order to become law, he's getting ready for a legal challenge, he said.

"I will be contacting as many groups as possible," he said Wednesday, noting that they include law firms willing to donate legal work.

Ruby said he was "pleasantly surprised" that the bill passed the House.

Despite Ruby's statement during the House debate Tuesday that the bill is not a ban on abortion, nor does it threaten doctors who treat ectopic pregnancies, nor does it affect use of birth control, Planned Parenthood said Wednesday the bill would do all those things.

"The bill was specifically crafted as a challenge to the Roe v. Wade decision," said Tim Stanley, senior director of government and public affairs for Planned Parenthood Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, referring to the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court case that legalized abortion. "HB 1572 could also outlaw contraception as well as medical procedures used to treat tubal pregnancies and infertility."

Planned Parenthood said the bill doesn't represent the views of most North Dakotans and is an attempt by a "narrow minority fixated on an agenda" to drive public policy.

"We hope to defeat it in the Senate," Stanley said. "But in the meantime, we have some of the best legal minds in the country strategizing and assessing all of our options. "

Conservative activist Steve Cates of Bismarck appeared with Ruby at a news conference Wednesday to say the bill is based on "empirical science ... like the law of gravity." He said science is reaching the point where, in five or six years, an embryo can be implanted into an artificial uterus and people will be born through that process, just as in vitro fertilization was developed decades ago and now is routinely used.

Cole works for Forum Communications Co., which owns The Forum. She can be reached at (701) 224-0830 or forumcap@btinet.net