

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection.

### Georgia Senate Passes Anti-abortion “Heartbeat” Bill

Source: Maya T. Prabhu, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 22, 2019

The Georgia Senate on Friday approved what would be among the strictest abortion laws in the country on a party-line vote after more than four hours of debate.

House Bill 481 would outlaw abortions once a doctor detects a heartbeat in the womb — which is usually at about six weeks into a pregnancy and before most women know they are pregnant. Current Georgia law allows abortions to be performed until 20 weeks.

Georgia is poised to become the third state in as many weeks to pass similar legislation. A federal judge blocked Kentucky’s version of the law hours after it was signed by that state’s governor.

Earlier this week, Mississippi’s governor also signed “heartbeat” legislation into law. Last year, a court struck down that state’s 15-week abortion ban, calling it unconstitutional.

Georgia’s legislation now heads back to the House, which will have to approve changes made in the Senate. The House narrowly passed the original bill earlier this month.

Acworth Republican state Rep. Ed Setzler, who sponsored the bill, said he is looking forward to taking the legislation across the finish line before the session adjourns April 2.

“We have really taken great lengths to balance the legitimate interests of women with the basic right to life of the child,” he said.

Democrats vowed to use the vote to defeat Republicans in the 2020 elections.

Gov. Brian Kemp is expected to sign the legislation if it wins final passage. He vowed during his 2018 campaign to sign the strictest abortion laws in the country. In a statement shortly after the vote, Kemp said the Senate “affirmed Georgia’s commitment to life.”

“I applaud the members who supported the heartbeat bill’s passage for protecting the vulnerable and giving a voice to those who cannot yet speak for themselves,” Kemp said.

The American Civil Liberties Union has already said it will file a lawsuit if the measure wins final passage.

Many Republican lawmakers have said the bill was proposed in response to a New York law that expanded access to abortion.

During sometimes emotional debate Friday, Senate Science and Technology Chairwoman Renee Unterman, who shepherded the bill through the chamber, told her story of having to get a hysterectomy when she was 22 years old, making her unable to have children.

She later adopted two children — children she was happy that women decided to carry to term.

“We are not like New York or Virginia,” she said. “We will not throw away children who aren’t perfect because all children are perfect in the eyes of God.”

One by one, the Senate’s Democratic women — clad in white in recognition of women’s rights and the suffrage movement — told emotional personal stories and those of others who had either had abortions or had problems in childbirth.

State Sen. Jen Jordan, an Atlanta Democrat, recounted her 10 pregnancies that resulted in only two children. She had eight miscarriages, one of them when she was five months pregnant — “Her name was Juliette,” Jordan said.

“I have been on my knees time after time in prayer over my losses,” she said. “But no matter my faith, my beliefs, my losses, I have never strayed from the basic principle that each woman must be able to make her decisions with her God and her family.”

The measure was approved 34-18, with Unterman the only woman to vote in favor of the legislation. State Sen. Kay Kirkpatrick of Marietta, an orthopedic hand surgeon and the only other Republican woman in the chamber, was excused to attend a funeral.

Democrats pointed to the growing number of suburban women who voted in the 2018 elections, helping the party win several seats from metro Atlanta Republican lawmakers.

“Come 2020, this bill will help elect more women,” said freshman state Sen. Sally Harrell, an Atlanta Democrat. “Vote yes for this bill and we’re coming for your seats because that’s how democracy works.”

After remaining quiet the past few weeks, more than 100 local businessmen and women released a letter Friday publicly voicing their opposition to the legislation. Several prominent medical groups, including the Medical Association of Georgia — a doctors lobby — have also urged lawmakers to defeat the bill.

Debate has been emotional the past few weeks, with about 20 state House members turning their backs on Setzler when he presented the bill in that chamber and hundreds of residents filling the Capitol to lobby their elected officials.

On at least one occasion, police escorted Unterman to her car after a committee hearing on the bill. Bomb dogs have searched rooms before committee hearings and were roaming the Capitol throughout the day Friday.

State police officers were called in to Atlanta from across Georgia to be on standby, evidenced by at least 30 cruisers parked outside the Capitol. It was the largest police presence in recent memory during a Capitol floor debate.

Under the proposal, women still would be able to get later abortions in cases of rape, incest, if the life of the mother is in danger or in instances of “medical futility,” when a fetus would not be able to survive after birth.

Someone who has become pregnant after an incident of rape or incest would have to file a police report to have the abortion performed.

The bill would also allow parents to claim an embryo, once a heartbeat is detected, on their taxes as dependents and count a fetus toward the state’s population in the census.

While an analysis of the fiscal impact to the state has not yet been completed, Setzler said he believed the cost to Georgia in lost tax revenue would be between \$10 million and \$20 million a year.

There are currently about 20 lawsuits surrounding abortion — including several heartbeat laws — up for consideration by the U.S. Supreme Court that could be used to challenge the Roe v. Wade decision. The 1973 ruling established a nationwide right to abortion.

Georgia anti-abortion activists hope the state’s heartbeat bill will be the one that overturns the court’s ruling.

### **Possible Response Questions:**

- What are your thoughts about the proposed new abortion law in Georgia?
- Pick a passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a “move” made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.