



ABORTION-RIGHTS ADVOCATES, OPPONENTS CONTINUE TO SPAR, WITH EYE ON FALL BALLOT - CRONKITE NEWS

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Photo: Both sides of the abortion rights issue rallied outside the Capitol on Wednesday, as lawmakers debated repeal of an 1864 abortion ban in Arizona. The protests were peaceful, and much of the focus was on the expected ballot initiative that could enshrine abortion rights in the Arizona Constitution. (Photo by Martin Dreyfuss/Cronkite News)

While lawmakers inside the Capitol were jockeying over efforts to repeal a near-total abortion ban from 1864, advocates on both sides of the issue who gathered outside the Capitol Wednesday were looking forward to fights at the ballot box this fall.

Hundreds showed up over the course of the day, carrying signs, handing out literature and manning tables in hopes of recruiting people to their cause.

It came as Democrats tried – and failed – for a second week to repeal the 19th century law that was revived last week by the Arizona Supreme Court, that makes abortion a felony except to save the life of the mother. But the effort inched forward in the Senate, before both chambers adjourned until next week.

“This is a good law I think,” Patrick Williams said of the [1864 law](#). “It does make an exception for the life of the mother; it penalizes only the physician with prison time, not the mother.

“I don’t think any women will die from this law,” said Williams, one of the abortion opponents who gathered outside the Capitol Wednesday morning.

That could not be farther from the position advocated by Chris Love and others who turned out to push for repeal and rally support for a proposed [ballot initiative](#) that would enshrine abortion rights in the Arizona Constitution.

“Arizona wants to see this issue on the ballot. Regardless of what happens over there (in the Capitol) our campaign is moving forward,” said Love, standing in front of a table where volunteers were collecting petition signatures for the Arizona for Abortion Access initiative to make abortion a “fundamental right” up until fetal viability.

The ballot initiative’s supporters said last week that they had already collected more than 500,000 petition signatures, more than 100,000

above the number they will need by July 3 to put the issue on the November ballot. But they said they plan to continue gathering signatures and educating supporters.



Abortion opponents, meanwhile, turned out with graphic posters showing fetal development and aborted fetuses, and sporting shirts and signs that said “baby lover,” “abortion is murder” and “Jesus is love.”

Despite the emotional nature of the debate, protests outside the Capitol were entirely peaceful Wednesday. While one side occasionally shouted over the other, they were just as likely to talk to one another - or listen.

Rep. Alma Hernandez, D-Tucson, a leader of the repeal effort on the House floor Wednesday, could be seen outside the Capitol engaged in a respectful debate with an abortion opponent.

As advocates waited in line to get into the Capitol, members of the anti-abortion group Women Speak Out were overheard asking others in line to go door to door to campaign against the abortion-rights initiative, pitching it as a great job for retirees and high schoolers alike.

Debate inside the Capitol was restrained as well, after Democratic outbursts in the House last week when Republicans blocked an attempt to force a vote on a [repeal bill](#). Despite the same results this week, there were no outbursts Wednesday after House Republicans narrowly blocked a vote on a series of procedural measures.

Attorney General Kris Mayes said in a prepared statement after the votes, that, “Once again, the legislature has failed.”

“It is abundantly clear that the majority party wants this 160-year-old law to take effect,” [her statement](#) said. “Complicated or complex decision making is not required to repeal this insane law that doesn’t even include exceptions for rape or incest.”

While House action stalled, Senate Democrats, joined by Republican Sens. T.J. Shope and Shawna Bolick, were able to introduce a repeal bill Wednesday. But it could be weeks before [that measure](#) comes up for a vote.

The Supreme Court put [its ruling](#) on hold to allow for legal challenges, but without action the near-total ban would take effect - overriding a 2022 law that allows abortions [up to 15 weeks](#) of pregnancy. That’s why Love and others say action is needed now.

“Quite frankly, we would love a repeal because one day without abortion services in this state is one too many,” Love said. “But regardless of the outcome, whether it’s an 1864 ban or a 15-week ban, it’s a ban and bans hurt pregnant people.”