

Texas Calls 2nd Special Session On Abortion

BY JIM VERTUNO AND
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Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Gov. Rick Perry on Wednesday called a second special session of the Texas Legislature to pass widespread abortion restrictions across the nation's second-largest state, after the first attempt by Republicans died overnight following a marathon one-woman filibuster.

Perry ordered lawmakers to meet again on July 1 to act on the abortion proposals, as well as separate bills that would boost highway funding and deal with a juvenile justice issue. The sweeping abortion rules would close nearly all the state's abortion clinics and impose other widespread restrictions.

Perry can call as many 30-day extra sessions as he likes, but lawmakers can only take up those issues he assigns.

The debate over abortion restrictions led to the most chaotic day in the Texas Legislature in modern history, starting with a marathon filibuster and ending with a down-to-the wire, frenetic vote marked by questions about whether Republicans tried to break chamber rules and jam the measure through.

Democrats put their hopes of thwarting the bill in the hands of Wendy Davis, a state senator clad in pink running shoes, for a daylong attempt to talk the bill to death. Over the duration of the speech, Davis became a social media star, even becoming the subject of a tweet from President Obama for her efforts.

But just before midnight, Republicans claimed she strayed off topic and got help with a back brace — two things that are against filibuster rules — and cut her off.



ALBERTO MARTINEZ/AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN/MCT
Sen. Rodney Ellis, left, helps fellow senator, Wendy Davis put on a back support belt during her filibuster in the Senate Chamber, in Austin, Texas. The action prompted a point of order, which was supported in 17-11 vote. Davis is filibustering in attempt to kill SB 5 which would regulate abortion procedures, providers and facilities.

That cleared the way for a vote.

But when Republican Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst shouted into the microphone, trying to call the final votes, nobody seemed to hear him. Some 400 supporters jammed into the gallery had taken their feet with a deafening roar, drowning out his voice. It was, as some claimed, a "people's filibuster" — an attempt by protesters to finish what Davis had started more than 11 hours earlier.

"Get them out!" Republican Sen. Donna Campbell shouted to a security guard. "... I want them out of here!"

As the crowd clapped and shouted "shame, shame, shame," Dewhurst gathered Republican lawmakers around Secretary of the Senate Patsy Spaw to register their votes. Democrats ran forward, holding up their cell phones, which showed it was past midnight.

But Dewhurst and other Republicans insisted the first vote was cast before midnight by the Legislature's clock and that the bill had passed.

By the time decorum was restored and the 19-10 vote in favor of the measure was recorded, the clock read 12:03 a.m. Confusion took over: The Republicans had passed the bill, but did it count? Were the votes tallied in time?

Reporters checked the Senate's official website and saw the vote registered on Wednesday, after the deadline. But a short time later, the website was updated to show the vote on Tuesday. Sen. Chuy Hinojosa produced two official printouts of the vote, each showing a different day for the same vote.

After protests from angry Democrats, senators met privately with Dewhurst for more than an hour. Eventually, he returned to the then-empty Senate chamber and declared that while the bill had passed, he didn't have time to sign it, so it wasn't approved. In return for declaring the measure dead, Democrats promised not to question the date of the vote any further.

While altering a public record is illegal, stopping the

clock to allow for a vote or changing the journal before it is published are long traditions in the Texas Legislature and unlikely to lead to a prosecution.

The bill would have banned abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy and forced many clinics that perform the procedure to upgrade their facilities and be classified as ambulatory surgical centers. Also, doctors would be required to have admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles — a tall order in rural communities.

The law's provision that abortions be performed at surgical centers means only five of Texas' 42 abortion clinics would remain in operation in a state 773 miles wide and 790 miles long with 26 million people. A woman living along the Mexico border or in West Texas would have to drive hundreds of miles to obtain an abortion.

Conservatives and anti-abortion campaigners joined Dewhurst in condemning the "unruly mob" for violating the Senate's decorum by screaming obscenities at Republican backers of the bill.

Texas Democrats, though, see an opportunity to capitalize just months after setting up a grassroots organization called "Battle-ground Texas" with a \$36 million cash infusion. And they circled around Davis — the teen mom turned Harvard Law School grad whose Twitter followers rocketed from 1,200 to 83,000 in just 24 hours.

"As Sen. Wendy Davis most powerfully emphasized, Democrats are not afraid of a fight," said Gilberto Hinojosa, Texas Democratic Party chairman. "Last night was a turning point in that story of Texas."

Mystery Of Snowden Location Deepens

MOSCOW (AP) — Moscow's main airport swarmed with journalists from around the globe Wednesday, but the man they were looking for, National Security Agency leaker Edward Snowden, was nowhere to be seen.

The mystery of his whereabouts only deepened a day after President Vladimir Putin said that Snowden was in the transit area of Sheremetyevo Airport.

There were ordinary scenes of duty free shopping, snoozing travelers and tourists sipping coffee but no trace of America's most famous fugitive. If Putin's statement is true, it means that Snowden has effectively lived a life of airport limbo since his weekend flight from Hong Kong, especially with his American passport now revoked by U.S. authorities.

Adding to the uncertainty, Ecuador's foreign minister said it could take up to two months to decide whether to grant asylum to Snowden and the Latin American nation would take into consideration its relations with the U.S. Foreign Minister Ricardo Patino compared Snowden's case to that of Julian Assange, the founder of anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks, who has been given asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

Nelson Mandela In Critical Condition

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — South Africa's president visited a gravely ill Nelson Mandela in the hospital on Wednesday night, and canceled a visit planned for the next day to Mozambique, an indication of heightened concern over the deteriorating health of the man widely considered the father of the country.

President Jacob Zuma found 94-year-old Mandela to still be in critical condition during the 10 p.m. visit and was briefed by doctors "who are still doing everything they can to ensure his well-being," Zuma's office said in a statement.

It said the president decided to cancel a visit to Maputo, the Mozambican capital, on Thursday, where he was to attend a meeting on regional investment.

As worries over Mandela mounted, Mac Maharaj, the presidential spokesman, declined to comment on media reports that the former president and anti-apartheid leader was on life support systems in the Pretoria hospital where he was taken June 8 to be treated for what the government said was a recurring lung infection.

Texas Execution 500th Since 1982

HUNTSVILLE, Texas (AP) — Texas, the nation's busiest death penalty state, is set to mark a solemn moment in criminal justice Wednesday with the execution of convicted killer Kimberly McCarthy.

If McCarthy is put to death in Huntsville as planned, she would become the 500th person executed in Texas since the state resumed carrying out the death penalty in 1982. The 52-year-old also would be the first woman executed in the U.S. since 2010.

McCarthy's attorney, Maurie Levin, said she has exhausted all efforts to block the execution, after denials by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals.

Texas has carried out nearly 40 percent of the more than 1,300 executions in the U.S. since the Supreme Court allowed capital punishment to resume in 1976. The state's standing stems from its size as the nation's second most populous state as well as its tradition of tough justice for killers.

Broad Immigration Bill Cruising To Senate Passage, House Using Different Approach

BY DAVID ESPO AND
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Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Far-reaching immigration legislation cruised toward passage in the Senate as House Republicans pushed ahead Wednesday on a different approach that cracks down on millions living in the United States illegally rather than offering them a chance at citizenship.

Presidential politics took a more prominent role in a long-running national debate as Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., tried to reassure conservatives that many of the criticisms of the bill, which he helped write, are "just not true."

The potential 2016 White House contender said in remarks on the Senate floor it has been difficult for him "to hear the worry and the anxiety and the growing anger in the voices of so many people who helped me get elected to the Senate and who I agree with on virtually every other issue."

The political impact of the issue aside, there was no doubt that the Senate bill was on track for passage by Thursday or Friday.

Supporters posted 67 votes or more on each of three procedural tests Wednesday, far more than the 60 needed to prevail. More than a dozen Republicans sided with Democrats on each, assuring bipartisan support that the bill's backers hope will change minds in the House.

At its core, the legislation includes numerous steps to prevent future illegal immigration, while at the same time it offers a chance at citizenship for millions living in the country illegally.

It provides for 20,000 new Border Patrol agents, requires the completion of 700 miles of

fencing and requires an array of high-tech devices be deployed to secure the border with Mexico.

Businesses would be required to check on the legal status of prospective employees. The government would be ordered to install a high-tech system to check on the comings and goings of foreigners at selected international airport in the United States.

Other provisions would expand the number of visas for highly skilled workers relied upon by the technology industry. A separate program would be established for lower-skilled workers, and farm workers would be admitted under a temporary program.

Some farm workers who are in the country illegally can qualify for a green card, which bestows permanent residency status, in five years.

Many of the bill's supporters also cheered a ruling from the Supreme Court that said married gay couples are entitled to the same federal benefits as heterosexual couples. The decision would allow gay

married citizens or permanent residents to sponsor their foreign-born spouses for U.S. residency, and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano pledged to implement it.

The basic legislation was drafted by four Democrats and four Republicans who met privately for months to produce a rare bipartisan compromise in a polarized Senate. They fended off unwanted

changes in the Senate Judiciary Committee, and then were involved in negotiations with Republican Sens. John Hoeven of North Dakota and Bob Corker of Tennessee on a package of tougher border security provisions that swelled support among Republicans.

The deal-making that smoothed the way for the bill frustrated GOP dissenters, who complained angrily on the Senate floor late Wednesday that they weren't being al-

lowed to offer amendments. Supporters of the legislation vehemently disagreed, until Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., snapped: "I've just about had it on this."

Across the Capitol, an attempt at a bipartisan deal faltered, and majority Republicans began moving ahead on legislation tailored to the wishes of conservatives and vehemently opposed by Democrats.

The House Judiciary Committee already has approved two measures and agreed to a third during the day Wednesday as it followed a piecemeal path rather than the all-in-one approach of the Senate.

The House bill approved Wednesday, on a vote of 22-9, would require businesses to check on the legal status of employees within two years, as compared with four in the Senate measure.

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