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Walker says he'll sign 20-week abortion ban with or without rape, incest exemptions

Gov. Scott Walker says he will sign a proposed ban on abortion after 20 weeks regardless of whether it includes exemptions for rape and incest.

The current draft of the bill, up for a joint public hearing today, does not include the exceptions, and Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, has said he was unsure if the bill would move in his house without them.

Walker earlier this year issued a letter pledging to sign a ban after 20 weeks once it reaches his desk.

Following an appearance in Delavan Monday, the guy said "most people think it's reasonable to say that after five months, an unborn child ... can feel pain." Opponents of the bill point to a 2005 report in the Journal of the American Medical Association that concluded available evidence suggested it was unlikely a fetus can feel pain before the third trimester.

"Whether you're pro-life or not, that's a good time to say that it shouldn't be legal," Walker said.

Asked if he would support a clause that made an exception for rape and incest, Walker added, "Again, it's an unborn life, it's an unborn child and that's where we feel strongly about it."

But, he added, "I'm prepared to sign it either way."

The bill is up for a joint public hearing today before the Assembly and Senate Health committees. The Senate Health and Human Services Committee is looking at a Thursday exec on the bill, but won't set final details until today, according to the office of Chair Leah Vukmir, R-Wauwatosa. Assembly Health Committee Chair Joe Sanfelippo, R-West Allis, hoped to have a better idea on the timing of a vote after today's hearing, his office said.

Walker, accompanied by his wife, Tonette, addressed the Boys & Girls Club of Walworth County. Walker, who grew up in Delavan, said he attended Phoenix Middle School, where the club is based.

Walker told reporters the U.S.A. Patriot Act, parts of which expired overnight, already provided the right balance between security and liberty.

"I think the Patriot Act formed a careful balance," Walker said. "We need to protect people's rights under the Constitution, but we also need to make sure that we could protect people from the kind of attacks that we're constantly under threat of."

Walker described the National Security Agency's ability to collect phone data as a "tool" to fight terrorism.

"I just think in this time when we see an increasing threat here and around the world, we need the tools," said the gov, who stopped short of offering specifics on how he would strike a compromise.

The gov said he gives Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner, R-Menomonee Falls, and other members of Congress credit for compromising with the U.S.A. Freedom Act, which reduces NSA data collection and cleared the House easily. Walker said he hopes "at a minimum, they'll pass what the House has been on record supporting and they'll do that sometime shortly."

But Walker repeated, "Long term ... we need to make sure we can collect information that can be used against known enemy combatants in the United States or people associated with them."

Walker insisted he's "not a candidate for anything" as he sidestepped a question about his support for eliminating mandatory minimum sentencing, especially for nonviolent crimes, a plan

endorsed by Jeb Bush and Rand Paul.

Although Walker said he believes criminal justice reform should be focused on the victim, he insisted, "I haven't signed onto any things like that because those are for candidates. I'm not a candidate for anything right now. Should I be a candidate, certainly I would look at that."

A few moments later, however, when asked if his travels to political events in New Hampshire and other states is preventing him from focusing on Wisconsin, Walker compared his travels to a businessman meeting with customers.

"Any small business owner or employer for that matter knows they get as much work done if they're traveling out to see their customers as they do if they're sitting in their headquarters all the time," Walker said.

Listen to the Q&A:

<http://wispolitics.com/1006/150601Walker.mp3>

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