

## Take a Stand: Pro-life, pro-choice advocates rally as vote nears

By TARA POHLMAYER Valley Morning Star | Posted: Friday, July 12, 2013 11:17 pm

HARLINGEN — Local pro-life and pro-choice groups weighed in as the abortion bill was being debated by the Texas Senate on Friday, in anticipation of a final vote.

Earlier in the week, about 200 pro-life families had gathered outside the Capitol building in Austin, where prayers were held. Meanwhile, pro-choice advocates rallied in Brownsville on Friday.

Police lined Central Boulevard in Brownsville Friday morning as the Stand with Texas Women bus stopped and demonstrators clad in orange T-shirts gathered, hoisting signs while chanting “Si se puede.”

“We wanted to give folks a chance to come out, rally and get together,” Patricia Rodriguez, political director of Planned Parenthood, said. “We have two buses criss-crossing the state.”

“I wish they’d come in front of our clinic,” Dr. Lester J. Minto said, identifying himself as “the proud owner” of Reproductive Services in Harlingen. The clinic performs abortions up to 15 weeks, according to its website.

With the bill’s passage, Minto said he would have to shut down the clinic that opened in 1990, leaving workers unemployed.

Minto, who has been practicing for more than 30 years, said the government “can’t take my gun and can’t take my speculum.”

“You’re going to have to pry it from my cold, dead hand,” Minto said as he waved a speculum while speaking at the rally.

“I’ve devoted my life to helping women,” Minto said. With the passing of the bill, “they’re going to go to second-rate people,” he said.

There will be injuries, he said.

Minto said an abortion at his clinic costs about \$400. The state legislation would limit availability though, he said, and abortions could cost \$3,000 or more.

“I stand by women and I always will,” Minto said.

State Rep. Rene Oliveira, D-Brownsville, spoke at the rally, saying, “None of us want abortions, but things happen... The fight’s not over. HB2 is unconstitutional.”

Oliveira also read a statement from state Rep. Eddie Lucio III, D-Harlingen, which concluded with, “Let’s not let women be treated like second-class citizens,” and led the crowd in chanting, “We will remember.”

Caty Wantland, a Brownsville resident, said “It’s about rights. Women in Texas deserve the right to govern their own bodies.”

“I don’t believe in taking away anyone’s choice,” JJ Sanchez said. The bill would also cut back on pre-natal care, he said.

On Monday, pro-life groups congregated at the Capitol. Blanca Villarreal and her daughter Marisa, both Harlingen residents, were there in Austin for the rally.

“It was spiritual warfare,” Villarreal said Friday. Others mocked them as they prayed the rosary, she said.

“There were 262 state troopers,” Villarreal said. “One trooper said he’s never seen anything like it.”

About 200 or more young families were there for the pro-life rally, she said. There was an hour and a half wait to get inside the state Capital gallery.

Villarreal also said the rally was of historical proportion, as the bishops prayed in front of the Capitol and exposed the blessed sacraments for the first time ever.

The pro-life rally also included Mass at St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Austin, she said.

“Current legislations under construction take a common sense approach,” the Catholic Bishops of Texas said. “Until the day when the tragedy of abortion has ended, we have a responsibility to ensure that these abortion facilities meet basic, reasonable standards of medical intervention when these procedures go wrong.”

Villarreal’s daughter said she was most struck by how passionate everyone was. “When we were in the gallery,” she said, “that’s when it became real.”

“I’ve always been very pro-life,” she said, but when she saw senators debating the bill, it was “inspiring.”

“We were standing there in blue, voluntarily fighting for a cause,” she said. “Women would be benefitting” from this bill, she said.

While both sides offer their responses, Villarreal urges people to, “find out what the bill is about before you choose a side.”