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Gov. Lee: Abortions included in Tennessee ban on non-emergency surgeries amid COVID-19 outbreak

March 25th, 2020 | by *Andy Sher*

NASHVILLE — Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee said Wednesday his **COVID-19 executive order barring "non-essential" medical procedures** would also apply to elective abortions.

"The executive order was certainly crafted in order to provide [personal protective equipment] for health care" professionals involved in the coronavirus response, as well as ensure resources were available for those suspected or already known to have the potentially deadly infection, the Republican said in an afternoon teleconference call with reporters.

"This would be like any other non-essential procedure," Lee said regarding abortion. "It would be treated the same, and my expectation and belief and certainly my expectation is that no non-essential procedures would be performed in the state during the crisis and during this time we need all of those supplies to be used on the frontlines of protecting citizens."

A spokesman for Planned Parenthood of Tennessee and North Mississippi declined to comment.

Officials in Mississippi, Texas and Ohio have issued similar edicts that include abortion.

Lee is personally opposed to abortion and took charge in this year's session on legislation that sought to challenge the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision legalizing most abortions.

Earlier, Lee spokesman Gillum Ferguson said in a statement that "Gov. Lee believes elective abortions aren't essential procedures, and given the state of [personal protective equipment] in Tennessee and across the country, his hope and expectation would be that those procedures not take place during this crisis."

The governor's Executive Order 18, issued Monday, bars all non-emergency dental work and non-essential surgical outpatient and hospital procedures.

It defines nonessential as including "any medical procedure that is not necessary to address a medical emergency or to preserve the health and safety of a patient, as determined by a licensed medical provider."

A spokeswoman for State Attorney General Herbet Slatery was quoted by The Associated Press saying Slatery is "ready to defend the actions of the executive branch in enforcing Executive Order 18."

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