Abortion bill due for debate
La. lawmakers draw battle lines

By ALLAN PURSINELL
Capitol news bureau

Stevens Rep. Alphonse Jackson is pro-choice on the abortion issue, but he predicts that some sort of anti-abortion bill will pass during the coming legislative session.

The abortion debate is not going to resolve around whether to pass an anti-abortion bill but around how restrictive such a bill will be, said Jackson, who chairs the Senate Health and Welfare Committee.

And Jackson, predicted, whatever happens this year, the debate on abortion will be a major topic in the Louisiana Legislature for years to come.

Jackson said pro-choice proponents have indicated they are not inclined to compromise on the issue. That is, Jackson said, pro-choice forces are not likely to agree to ban abortions with exceptions to allow abortions in cases of rape or incest.

"Right now," Jackson said, "they're saying they want it up or down."

Jackson said exceptions for such things as rape and incest would create tremendous enforcement problems.

Sen. Mike Cross, D-Baker, has professed a bill prohibiting abortions in all cases except when death of the child is the result of measures at birth to save the child or the mother.

Cross said that provision is intended to allow doctors to attempt to save the mother if her life is at risk, even if that might mean inducing early labor and death of the child.

He said if the present wording doesn't accomplish that, he's willing to rewrite it.

"After all, that's a life too," Cross said, referring to the life of the mother.

Cross said he approaches the issue from personal conviction, because he has an adopted son.

There are people out there willing to adopt these children," Cross said.

Cross chairs the Senate Health and Welfare Committee, the panel likely to hear any anti-abortion legislation in the Senate. Jackson chairs the House counterpart.

Going into the session, Roemer has said that although he is pro-life, he will veto any anti-abortion legislation that doesn't make exceptions for incest, rape or the health of the mother.

Roemer, a Methodist, said he made his position known at a meeting with the state's Catholic bishops, who discussed legislation that would allow no abortions.

"I said I would not sign that bill," Roemer said. "... I'm a right-to-lifer. I believe in the sanctity of that life ..., the life of the mother is precious as well.

"I just wanted to make it clear that the extremes proposed by some -- that there would be no abortions in any case -- would be unacceptable to me."

The Eagle Forum, an anti-abortion group, plans an April 18 rally in Baton Rouge. Eagle Forum and other anti-abortion groups have bought 30,000 baby rattles to be mailed during the Legislative session.

"When you look at a rattie, you think of a baby," said Kay Rehotto, chairman of Eagle Forum's Steverson area chapter.

Advocates of legalized abortion have formed a coalition of diverse organizations in support of the pro-choice stance, according to Robin Rotrock, president of the Louisiana League of Women Voters.

The group is called the Louisiana Coalition for Reproductive Freedom.

"There is no compromise on this issue," Rotrock said.

A statewide poll conducted for the Morning Advocate and State-Times last year by New Orleans pollster Ed Renwick showed that only 17 percent of the state's voters would allow abortion when the mother doesn't want the child and 74 percent said they would oppose it.

A total of 83 percent said they would allow abortion to save the life of the mother.

SEE ABORTION, 6A

CONTINUED FROM 1A

Friday, April 13, 1990
Page 4A, Column 1

The Houma Courier