Norma McCorvey, the Jane Roe of the 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, speaks Tuesday on the steps of the Capitol at a pro-choice rally.

Abortion factions lobby Roemer

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Forces on both sides of the abortion issue lobbied Gov. Buddy Roemer with speeches and rallies from the Capitol steps Tuesday in last-minute attempts to gain the governor’s attention. But even before the rallies were held, Roemer reaffirmed his pledge Tuesday to veto Rep. Louis “Woody” Jenkins’ stringent anti-abortion bill because it does not have exceptions for rape and incest. Under state

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law, Roemer must either sign or veto it this week.

Even a telegram purportedly from Nobel Prize winner Mother Teresa of Calcutta did not sway Roemer.

"Please know every child is from

God, and if they don't want them, I will take them," the telegram said.

Roemer said Mother Teresa sent a "powerful message," but it doesn't relate to his decision to veto Jenkins' bill.

"It relates to the decision of the potential mother, not me," Roemer said.

Despite his vow to veto the bill, Roemer said he thinks it is important to carry out his promise to give a fair ear to people on both sides. So far, he said, he hasn't heard anything to make him change his mind.

"Good people have made good arguments," Roemer said. "I'm listening to them with respect. What I'm doing now is respecting them. Some would laugh at the process, but it's important. This thing will not go away."

In recent days, Roemer and members of his staff have discussed the issue with Robert Win, Louisiana director of the National Right-to-Life Organization; Jenkins and Sen. Mike Cross, the Senate floor leader of the bill; state Catholic bishop; and members of Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union, said Rusty Jobour, Roemer's deputy chief of staff for communications.

Additionally, Roemer has received letters from the League of Women Voters and the National Organization for Women (NOW), Jobour said. While Roemer refuses to budge, anti-abortion forces refuse to give up, lobbying not only Roemer but the legislators needed to overturn Roemer's promised veto.

To overturn a veto, the anti-abortion activists will need 28 votes in the House and 26 votes in the Senate. Countering, the pro-choice advocates continue to campaign to keep Roemer from blocking to mounting pressure.

On the anti-abortion side, thousands cheer of "no vote, no veto" were directed at Roemer's fourth-floor Capitol office from the thousands of participants in the late afternoon rally. The crowd filled the Capitol steps and spilled over into the parking lot.

The pro-choice gathering was smaller, drawing about 100 people, but was nonetheless significant because of keynote speaker Norma McCorvey, the "Jane Roe" of the 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision that legalized abortion.

Early Tuesday afternoon, McCorvey urged lawmakers to sustain Roemer's promised veto.

She appeared with Gloria Allred, a highly publicized women's rights activist from California, on the steps of the Capitol.

"If the governor does veto this bill, I urge the state Legislature not to override his veto," said McCorvey, who was necessarily nervous. "The atmosphere is strong and very committed here in Louisiana."

Alfred, an attorney and president of the Women's Equal Rights Legal Defense and Education Fund, said if Jenkins' bill becomes law and the membership of the U.S. Supreme Court does not change, the anti-abortion legislation will not withstand the high court's scrutiny.

Alfred said Jenkins' bill would be "struck down even under Webster,

referring to the 1989 Missouri case that many believe opened the door for states to restrict abortions."

"I don't believe the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court are willing to criminalize abortion," Alfred said.

Alfred said the Supreme Court may be "willing to say" states do not have to fund abortions with public funds and that public hospitals do not have to subsidize abortions.

"But I do not believe that they are willing to go that far and dangerous step, which is to say that they will ban access to all abortions whether or not the woman can afford to have them on their own in private hospitals, for example, and private clinics," Alfred said.

Alfred said Louisiana is the "laughing stock" of "pro-choice California" and he promised a boycott of Louisiana if Jenkins' bill becomes law.

"We are going to see that no major organization does business and has a convention in the state of Louisiana," Alfred said. "This is going to be a boycott. That's for sure."

Alfred said all of the state's 144 legislators would receive letters urging them to vote to override Roemer's veto. He said Jenkins would receive the first one.

"I will say this, "Readjoy Lipton, no more," "pro-choice abortion law," Alfred said.

Attempts by Alfred and McCorvey to meet with the governor on Tuesday were unsuccessful. Jobour said Roemer did not meet because Roemer had "other appointments."

Hours after the pro-choice rally, anti-abortion advocates flooded the Capitol steps, springing into the parking lot and carrying posters and bumper stickers to proclaim their dismay with Roemer.

To open the rally, they sang "Jesus loves the little children" then changed the words to "Jesus loves the unborn children."

Posters included: "It's a grave problem." "Mommas help me, I want to live." "Adoption not abortion." "Abort Roemer not babies." "God hates hands that shed innocent blood."

In the opening speech, Lt. Gov. Paul Hardy, who has said he would have signed the legislation if it were his choice, praised the anti-abortion movement.

"This is a very difficult, very emotional, very intense, very complicated, very complex issue that faces us in this worldwide controversy with the entire world looking upon Louisiana today," Hardy said. "I want to immediately compliment all of the supporters of right to life...for the manner in which you have handled this issue that is so difficult at best and the way that you put your best foot forward and showing how truly and deeply you believe in the right to life."