'Fair, life-protecting rules' within reach, Roemer says

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Gov. Buddy Roemer admitted Thursday his administration has failed to come up with an abortion ban that reconciles the philosophical differences of abortion opponents and women who support access to abortions on demand.

But, Roemer added, neither has anyone else.

And, Roemer stopped just short of saying he supports women's rights to choose for themselves.

"Most people in Louisiana -- and I'm one of them -- think that the wide-open abortion window is not in the best interest of this nation or this state and that that window should be tightened," Roemer said during a Thursday news conference. "But, it has to be done in a way that allows women some power in the decision that they make.

"I know this is a difficult statement," he

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said at another point, "but women are capable of being counted and consulted with and make decisions about themselves and their families. And, the state has an interest broadly in protecting life. And, surely, there's a way to do that to keep the right of a woman for choice and privacy from being abused and to maintain that right."

Roemer said he thinks a woman must have "a right to have a say-so," but that the state has an interest as well in protecting the unborn.

"It makes a difficult thing when you have two principles sometimes at odds ... the principle that a woman is a real person with power and freedom and responsibility, and the fact that an unborn child, a fetus, has life in it," Roemer said. "And, what happens when those conflict? ... That's why in trying to weigh those balances, I felt our Legislature has erred on the side of ignoring women consistently."

"I think the vast majority of the citizens of this state support exceptions to their anti-abortion feeling, which I share, some exceptions that allow for some freedom of women for health, life of the woman, those sorts of things ... I'm not comfortable saying, "Well, I think a woman ought to have power, but that goes unchecked, unreined, unsupervised, unmonitored." I would never make that case; some women do."

Despite the conflict between the anti-abortion and pro-choice philosophies, Roemer said he would like to think it's possible to devise "fair, life-protecting rules" on abortions.

However, Roemer said later, the two positions might be so far apart that a middle ground cannot be found.

After the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1989 in a Missouri case that states have some authority to regulate abortions, anti-abortion activists began working on an abortion ban in Louisiana. They wanted a law that could be used to challenge the 1973 Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision that legalized most abortions.

In advance of the 1993 legislative session, Roemer said he planned to come up with an abortion ban bill, but the administration did not do so.

And, Roemer vetoed two stringent anti-abortion bills that came out of the 1990 session — one which sought to ban abortions except to save the life of the mother and another that provided rape and incest exceptions as well.

The Legislature this year approved an abortion ban with exceptions for rape, incest and to save the life of the mother. Roemer vetoed it, but the Legislature overrode the veto.

A U.S. District Judge in New Orleans earlier this week declared the new law unconstitutional, but the state is appealing the decision.