Roemer won't sign anti-abortion bill

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Gov. Buddy Roemer said Friday that he will not sign the nation's strongest anti-abortion bill, but may allow it to become law without his signature.

"I will not sign this bill," Roemer said in a statement released by his office. "I've made that decision. I've gone from three options to two. I will either veto the bill or allow it to become law without my signature."

Roemer said that although the bill provides exceptions for rape and incest, he was not happy with provisions of the legislation and the way the Legislature passed it during the closing days of the regular session.

"If, in fact, the bill honored my original request of adequate protection for life and against rape and incest, then I would feel differently," the governor said.

Roemer, who originally requested 30 days in which a woman would be allowed to report a rape and have an abortion later, said he was not happy with the bill's 7-day provision.

He also said he believed that the bill did not do enough to protect the mental health of the mother.

"It's an issue that gives me great concern," he said. "It's part of the discussion of how complex this is. At the very minimum, the mother's physical health has to be taken care of. Mental health of the mother is a legitimate point of discussion and has always been a concern to me."

The bill calls for up to 10 years in prison and fines of up to $100,000 for abortionists.

After Roemer originally vetoed a measure providing exceptions only for the life of the mother, the Legislature hastily assembled another bill that include rape and incest provisions.

However, the governor, pro-choice advocates and some lawmakers have expressed doubts whether the bill would pass court muster. The measure sent to Louisiana Attorney General

Roemer originally was a bill calling for a maximum $25 fine for those who assault flag burners. The Senate stripped all of those provisions out and amended it into an anti-abortion bill.

Roemer refused to speak with Capitol press corps members Thursday and his office said his remarks would be limited to the statement issued by his office.

There was no indication of when he would make a final decision on the bill. He has until July 29 to decide whether to veto the bill.

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William Gunte said Thursday that he sees nothing wrong with the anti-abortion measure.

"We believe the bill was constitutionally enacted by the Legislature," he said. "If in fact there were any procedural irregularities, which we do not concede, then they were certainly cured by the adoption of the bill by more than a two-thirds majority in each house."

An assistant state attorney general, Jennifer Schaye, said the bill would prohibit the use of intrauterine devices, or IUDs. An IUD is a metal or plastic device implanted by a physician in the uterus to prevent a fertilized egg from attaching itself to the uterine wall.

"Technically, this would be a violation because the premise is that life begins at conception and the law says any instrument or device used on a female constitutes the simple battery of abortion," Gunte said.

In another development, Mother Teresa was quoted as saying she never sent an anti-abortion message directly to Louisiana and was not aware that her name and picture were used in anti-abortion newspaper advertisements.

The governor quoted a telegram from Mother Teresa during a news conference. His press office said the message came via of a Louisiana priest, the Rev. Joseph Brennan of Lafayette.

Brennan, who works closely with Missionaries of Charity, the order established by Mother Teresa, said the message stemmed from a phone conversation he had with her July 1 in Rome. While Mother Teresa did not write the message, she was aware of it and agreed to the use of her name, he said.

The New Orleans Times-Picayune reported Thursday that a reporter had talked to Mother Teresa about the advertisements and she said she was not aware that her name and picture would be used that way.

Roemer's deliberations on the bill continued to create a national stir.