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Argentina: Abortion Bill Debate Gets Contentious in Senate

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A conservative version of the original abortion bill failed to pass the Senate commissions, so now the full Senate will debate which bill to vote on.

The abortion debate is continuing in Argentina with senate commissions rejecting modifications to the original bill which would have made abortions more difficult to obtain.

Conservative modifications were made to the house's original bill and voted on Wednesday in the three commissions currently debating its contents before the bill heads to the full Senate on August 9.

The rejected proposals included reducing a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy from 14 weeks to 12; allowing medical staff in private health institutions to abstain from performing an abortion on religious objections, and not penalizing doctors who refuse to perform abortions.

Those who favored the changes were nine out of 17 senators in the health commission; eight out of 17 in the justice commission, and nine out of 19 in constitutional affairs. None of the commissions approved the changes by the necessary majority.

Things got complicated when some senators tried to contend that only an overall majority among the three commissions was necessary to approve the changes.

CEO of the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS) based in Buenos Aires, Gaston Chillier, said: "We will sign a bill for the 'yes' vote with changes that do not alter the spirit of the project."

The bill modifications were proposed mainly by senators Laura Rodriguez Machado and Ernesto Martinez, both from President Mauricio Macri's Cambiemos party, and conservative Carlos Caserio.

The left-leaning Front for Victory coalition said on Tuesday that they will continue to support the house bill that would allow free, safe and legal abortions up to 14 weeks.

After the commissions concluded their votes each issued opinions on whether to vote on the house's original draft or the version or the modified draft. The plenary session next Wednesday must first debate which version to begin debating.

If any version of the abortion bill fails in the Senate, it is likely that the issue will not be addressed again until a new Congress is in session in 2020.

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