

Anti-Abortion Republicans Are Largely Quiet As Israel Adopts Liberal Abortion Law



WASHINGTON — Israel [adopted](#) this week one of the most liberal abortion laws in the world, and will now provide government funding for non-medical abortions for Israeli women aged 20 to 33.

But Washington's most anti-abortion lawmakers are largely silent on the new policy. These same members of Congress are also some of Israel's loudest defenders, highlighting a peculiar aspect of the relationship between many of Israel's ardent U.S. supporters and Israel's domestic political landscape.

Last month, a health ministry panel in Israel recommended the state pay for the abortions of women aged 20 to 33, including non-medical abortions. The measure was adopted this week, and will cost the state annually about \$4.6 million. Unlike in the

United States, abortion is relatively [non-controversial](#) in the country.

“They are sovereign nation they can do as they wish,” Sen. Lindsey Graham said of the policy. “That won’t happen in America.”

Sens. Marco Rubio and Ron Johnson, among others, declined to weigh in on the law citing unfamiliarity, while Sen. Ted Cruz referred BuzzFeed to his press office. A Cruz spokeswoman did not return a request for comment.

“I don’t really feel qualified to talk about what Israel should be doing on abortion,” said Sen. John McCain.

The office of Majority Leader Eric Cantor did not respond to a request for comment. And Rep. Chris Smith, who heads up the congressional anti-abortion caucus and has called Israel America’s “closest ally,” did not respond to several requests for comment to his office.

Smith has weighed in on international abortion law before, primarily regarding a change to Kenya’s constitution allowing for abortion in cases in which the mother’s health is at risk. He [charged in 2010](#) that the Obama administration had used taxpayer funds to lobby for the change. Smith has [called abortion](#) “a serious, lethal violation of fundamental human rights.”

Rep. Trent Franks, who chairs the Israel Allies Caucus in the House, was one of the few members BuzzFeed spoke with who was aware of Israel’s abortion policies. Franks is also one of the most outspoken anti-abortion politicians in Congress.

“The truth is it’s something that breaks my heart, that a country that I love as much as I do would take such a position,” Franks said. “It’s one of the greatest heartbreaks to me about Israel is their position on protecting innocent life. In the final analysis, it weakens Israel profoundly as a nation and weakens us as a human family when we don’t have the clarity and commitment to protect the most innocent among us.”

“This comes from someone who loves Israel with all of his heart and they know that I’ve chaired the Israel allies caucus here for years and let me just say to you no one loves Israel more than I do,” he added. “But I hold the position that the same thing that makes me care about other countries — it’s the people and if we exclude certain members among us, isn’t that really the genesis of most of the wars among us?”

Rep. Steve King said the law was “news to him” but said it “saddens me to learn that they devalue life to that point.”

“To compel taxpayers anywhere to pay for abortion is wrong,” he said. “I think abortion itself is immoral and wrong, but to compel taxpayers to fund it is also wrong. ... We’ve got a president who has promoted and encouraged federal funding for abortion. It’s hard to take a moral stand and tell Israel what they can and can’t do when you’ve got a country that’s being led the way ours is.”

The United States sends about \$3 billion per year in military aid to Israel, but neither Franks nor King was worried that that any of that money was fungible. A long-standing amendment explicitly prevents any U.S. aid from paying for abortion services.

Christian and anti-abortion groups in the U.S are opposed to Israel’s new law, but their response has been fairly muted. Several groups did send statements in response to a request for comment from BuzzFeed.

The Family Research Council has strongly supported Israel and helped facilitate various trips to the country for conservative members of Congress.

“Providing abortions free-of-charge, in any country, is an egregious offense against the sanctity of human life. Abortion proponents say that they want to make abortion ‘safe, legal and rare’ but the more a government funds abortion the higher the abortion rates go,” said Arina Grossu, director of the Center for Human Dignity at FRC in an email. “In the United States, according to a 2007 Guttmacher report, the Hyde Amendment ban on federal funding for abortion has prevented between 18-35% of women from having an

abortion. In other words, unrestricted federal funding for abortion will increase the number of women obtaining an abortion by an average of 25%. We can assume we will see similar results in Israel. No government should invest its money into killing its own citizens.”

Charmaine Yoest, president of Americans United for Life, said in a statement that “government power should never be used to end life and harm women.”

“We call on the Health Ministry to reject this proposed anti-life change in favor of real health-care that preserves life and protects women,” she said. “This change would come at a time when we are learning so much more about the dangers of abortions for women who could be placed at risk themselves by a policy that is far too cavalier and short-sighted.”

AUL has gotten directly involved in international abortion policy before: The group had previously filed an amicus brief with the Mexico Supreme Court urging the country to overturn their abortion law.

Jacob Fischler contributed reporting to this story.