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U.S. Pro-Life Groups Bite Their Tongues as Israel Expands Abortion Coverage

The Jewish State will spend millions more to subsidize the controversial procedure this year. Why that doesn't anger the American right.

You would expect conservative groups to go ballistic when it comes to taxpayer funding of abortions, but when Israel announced just that last month, the news was greeted with a subdued response among pro-life and pro-Israel groups in the U.S.

Israel will pay for all approved abortions for women aged 20 to 33, thanks to a recommendation accepted by its health ministry. Starting this year, Israel will spend 16 million shekels (\$4.6 million) to cover abortions for approximately 6,300 women.

“There is a large group of women between 20 and 40 who for various reasons—financial or reasons of secrecy—do not terminate pregnancies,” said Dr.

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Jonathan Halevy, the chairman of the “health basket” committee that recommended the policy, adding that he hopes universal abortion coverage is approved next.

Until now, as the *Times of Israel* points out, the cheapest privately funded abortions cost the equivalent of \$1,500, while their publicly funded counterparts cost \$714. Only women under 18 and over 40 were allowed to receive these cheaper abortions, while everyone else was forced to pay much more.

Ari Morgenstern, spokesman for Christians United for Israel (CUFI), which boasts more than 1 million members nationwide, the abortion policy won't change the organization's support for the Jewish State.

“CUFI is a single-issue organization that supports the democratically elected government of Israel regardless of whether or not we agree with the decisions taken by that government,” he said.

Tom McClusky a spokesman for the March for Life said, “It seems that especially while a lot of Europe and also Russia and the former Soviet Union is having trouble keeping up with birthrates, that it'd be a pretty poor policy for a country to take right now.” When asked if he thought the new provision might alienate pro-Israel American conservatives, McClusky added, “A lot of people that I've partnered with here and at my former job [the Family Research Council] who were pro-Israel were also pro-life. It seems they'd just be another country where we'd be looking to overturn a law.”

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Dr. Charmaine Yoest, the CEO of Americans United for Life (AUL), decided to use Jewish law as a defense, saying “In a meaningful passage, the Talmud teaches that ‘Whosoever preserves a single soul..., [it is] as though he had preserved a complete world.’ Unborn lives are rich with possibilities and worth saving and government should never be used to harm life and harm women.”

“People who support Israel—even if they're conservative on social values—

they're lives are not going to be changed by [this issue,]" said Steve Rosen, a former leading official at the American Israel Public Affairs

Committee (AIPAC). "One of the things you have to remember is that Israel's abortion policy was liberal last year too, very liberal—one of the most liberal in the world—and they went even further in that direction."

And, of course, it goes both ways, "The people who are the furthest left on the abortion issue," says Rosen, "are not going to be so happy about this news that it's going to change their unhappiness with Israel's settlement policy."

For the American right, Israel as an idea and Israel as a state with its own domestic policy, seems to remain separate.



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