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Rubio: No abortions for Zika-infected women

By **MARC CAPUTO** | 08/06/16 03:54 PM EDT

Sen. Marco Rubio said Saturday that he doesn't believe a pregnant woman infected with the Zika virus should have the right to an abortion — even if she had reason to believe the child would be born with severe microcephaly.

"I understand a lot of people disagree with my view – but I believe that all human life is worthy of protection of our laws. And when you present it in the context of Zika or any prenatal condition, it's a difficult question and a hard one," Rubio told POLITICO.

Story Continued Below

"But if I'm going to err, I'm going to err on the side of life."

Abortion and Zika became politically intertwined in June when [Congress failed](#) to pass a Zika-relief bill, in part due to a dispute over Planned Parenthood. Zika has started to spread quickly through Florida, which now has 422 cases -- more than any other state in the nation -- and it has alarmed families and health experts because the virus has been linked to severe microcephaly in infants born to some infected pregnant women.

"We've never before had a mosquito-borne disease that can cause a birth defect," the Centers for Disease Control's director, Tom Frieden, said Thursday in Doral after touring Wynwood. "That's why we take it so seriously. The key is to protect pregnant women."

Without prompting, Rubio acknowledged the challenges of the birth defects that result from Zika.

"Obviously, microcephaly is a terrible prenatal condition that kids are born with. And when they are, it's a lifetime of difficulties," he said. "So I get it. I'm not pretending to you that that's an easy question you asked me. But I'm pro-life. And I'm strongly pro-life. I believe all human life should be protected by our law, irrespective of the circumstances or condition of that life."

Rubio has taken a leadership role in trying to prevent the spread of Zika. He became the first Republican to co-sponsor President Obama's \$1.9 billion Zika-fighting legislation, which was watered down by House Republicans after it passed the Senate. The legislation ultimately failed. Rubio points out that he voted for every Zika bill he could.

The campaign of one of his Democratic Senate opponents, U.S. Rep. Patrick Murphy, pointed to that vote and said in a press release Saturday that "Rubio exploited the Zika crisis to attack women's health funding and Planned Parenthood."

A staunch pro-life conservative, Rubio's position on abortion has been consistent in the Florida Legislature, U.S. Senate and the campaign trail. A year ago, for instance, Rubio said on the presidential debate stage that he was opposed to abortion in cases of rape or incest. Murphy's campaign called that position "extreme and offensive."

Rubio took issue with the Democrats' raising Planned Parenthood because, he said, "the words Planned Parenthood don't appear anywhere in the law."

Rubio said the bill limited federal Zika money to "community health centers and hospitals, basically Medicare providers... with limited funds, you

wanted to ensure those funds were going to facilities in every community in the state. In the end, I voted for laws that don't have that condition there, either. I just want the money to start flowing."

Rubio faulted Democrats for not passing the scaled-back legislation.

"The Planned Parenthood angle is something they basically made up to have a political reason not to pass Zika so they can come back in August and campaign on it," he said. "That's what I mean by political volleyball. Both sides have played that game. I would have preferred the House just passed a clean funding bill and I'll vote for that if it comes out."



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Authors:

Marc Caputo

✉ mcaputo@politico.com

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