



PRESIDENT BUSH CASTS FIRST VETO

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President Bush has issued his first ever veto, one of the most powerful presidential authorities which enables the chief executive to say no to a bill passed by Congress.

This was the president's first use of the veto in his five-and-a-half years in office. The proposed law would have allowed federal funding to go toward research using stem cells from human embryos -- a process that requires the embryos to be destroyed.

President Bush, who is pro-life, said that if the bill became law, "American taxpayers would, for the first time in our history, be compelled to fund the deliberate destruction of human embryos, and I'm not going to allow it."

But supporters of the bill say the research could lead to cures of many diseases.

What is the veto?

The power of the veto, Latin for "I forbid," stems from Article One of the U.S. Constitution which requires that all legislation pass before the president for approval. The president has 10 days to sign the bill or reject it with a veto.

If the president does not sign or veto the bill in 10 days, it becomes law without his signature.

If the president vetoes a bill, Congress can override his veto with a two-thirds majority vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. In the case of the stem cell bill, Congress did not have enough votes to override President Bush's veto.

Historical use of the veto

The use of the presidential veto has evolved over time. Early presidents used it sparingly, when they felt Congress had violated the Constitution. Thomas Jefferson never cast a veto.

But by Andrew Jackson's presidency in 1832, presidents began using the veto as a political tool. Jackson used the veto to reject the renewal of the charter of the Second Bank of the United States.

"Rather than just arguing that the bank is unconstitutional, Jackson is arguing that the bank is wrong," Brian Balogh, a historian at the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia, told the International Herald Tribune. "This is a real change in the assertion of presidential power."

President Bush's use of the veto

The fact that President Bush did not use his veto for over five years was unusual. Most presidents since President Truman used the veto an average of two times a year, according to historian Kathryn Dunn Tenpas, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who appeared on a July 19 NewsHour discussion.

Tenpas said one of the reasons President Bush did not have to use his veto was because the Republicans who control Congress are from his same party and often handed him bills that were to his liking.

Although the president has just issued his first veto, political experts say he still has used his presidential influence by threatening to veto legislation and using a technique called "signing statements."

On several occasions, the president has signed bills, then issued statements reserving the right not to enforce or execute parts of the new laws on the grounds that they infringe on presidential authority, or violate national security or other constitutional provisions.

In this way, he has challenged parts of laws, including a congressional ban on torture, a request for data on the USA Patriot Act, whistle-blower protections and the banning of U.S. troops in fighting rebels in Colombia, according to The Washington Post.

A panel of legal scholars and lawyers assembled by the American Bar Association recently criticized the use of signing statements as undermining the Constitution, but the president and his supporters defend them.

"They're a way to try to assert an independent view by the executive branch in ways that they think will be held up by the courts. It's not quite a veto, but it's definitely in a gray area that I don't think we've seen before," said Michael Franc of the conservative Heritage Foundation on the July 19 NewsHour.

The Justice Department has said that President Bush has issued 110 signing statements, compared with President Bill Clinton's 80.

-- *Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra*

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