

# Connelly's crusade tails again

Advance Albany Bureau

ALBANY — Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly rode an emotional roller coaster yesterday.

The West Brighton Democrat saw her proposal to eliminate most Medicaid funding for abortions seemingly headed for success, only to have it fail in a dramatic late-night vote for the fourth consecutive year.

During 11 hours of heated debate and sometimes bizarre behind the scenes maneuvering, Mrs. Connelly engaged in heated conflicts with her party's leaders, did quiet lobbying and ultimately waited for the measure's fate to be determined in an Italian restaurant near the Capitol.

In between, Mrs. Connelly had to be rushed to a nearby doctor's office when she said a heated party conference raised her blood pressure to dangerously high levels.

The evening ended with Mrs. Connelly, still dressed in the green suit she wore to the Assembly chambers that morning, joining an adversary on the abortion issue in an unusual midnight lobbying session. Both were seeking a restoration of funds for a court monitor of Staten Island Developmental Center.

"I feel like I've been here a week today," Mrs. Connelly said as she left the now empty chamber about 12:30 a.m.

Her day had started in a near-empty chamber when she lashed into party leaders for scheduling debate on her abortion amendment when most lawmakers were not present.

"I give the members the courtesy of my presence," she said her voice quavering. Mrs. Connelly demanded a roll call be taken to determine if there was a quorum of the Assembly's 150 members, a motion which was granted and quickly resulted in the lawmakers filing back into the chamber.

The chambers now occupied, Mrs. Connelly led the three-hour debate for abortion foes.

Referring to arguments that denying poor women procedures available to those who can pay for them is discriminatory, Mrs. Connelly said:

"The issue isn't the poor. The issue is we are spending tax money for a very onerous procedure."

Waving a copy of a full-page

newspaper advertisement against a cut off of Medicaid abortion funds, Mrs. Connelly said those who take out such ads "should be spending their money helping, instead of spending it asking people to support the devastation of human life."

As she began summing up her argument, a very peculiar thing began to happen: Republican opponents of her proposal were walking out of the chamber. Assembly Speaker Stanley Fink, D-Brooklyn, also an opponent of her proposal, noticed this. He stopped Mrs. Connelly in midsentence and ordered an immediate conference of Democratic lawmakers.

Fink knew that if the 10 GOP "pro-choice" lawmakers did not vote, Mrs. Connelly's proposal would pass. On an amendment, unlike on legislation, only a majority vote of those present is needed for it to pass.

The GOP assemblymen said they were just trying to show their power after months of "being ignored" by the Democratic majority in budget discussions.

At a Democratic conference, it was suggested that an equal number of "pro-life" backers take a walk to equalize the absent GOP lawmakers. Mrs. Connelly said she became furious with what she considered a "politicizing" of a moral issue and made some "heated" comments to party leaders.

Her blood pressure apparently rose along with her temper and she was rushed to a nearby doctor's office.

After receiving medical treatment, Mrs. Connelly returned about 8 p.m. to the Capitol for a meeting with Fink. The speaker said he had not decided what to do and suggested she get something to eat in a nearby restaurant.

A couple of hours later, Fink decided to play the Republicans' bluff. The vote was taken and the 10 protesting GOP lawmakers all cast negative ballots, sealing the amendment's fate.

Reporters asked her how she felt. "Disappointed," she replied. But at least, Mrs. Connelly said, the matter had been given a fair vote.

Moments after the Assembly recessed, Mrs. Connelly joined Barbara Shack, legislative lobbyist for the New York Civil Liberties Union, at a meeting with Ways and Means Committee Chairman Arthur J. Kremer, D-Nassau. For most of the day, Ms. Shack, who says all women have a right to an abortion, was lobbying against Mrs. Connelly's amendment.

Now, they were both asking Kremer to seek approval of a \$300,000 addition to the state budget for the Willowbrook Review Panel, a court monitor of care for former and current residents of the Staten

Island Developmental Center.

They got Kremer's agreement, shook hands, and left the chamber.

"It's been a long, long day," she said excusing herself.

— BRUCE ALPERT