

House Investigators of Planned Parenthood Have a Lot of Work to Do

Congress took significant steps forward last week in its continued efforts to hold Planned Parenthood and fetal tissue procurement companies accountable for the sale and trafficking of aborted fetal tissue.

The House Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives has recommended a criminal investigation of Planned Parenthood of the Gulf Coast for potentially violating Texas and U.S. law in its sale of fetal tissue.

The panel also issued nine criminal and regulatory referrals for various abortion providers and tissue procurement companies located in Arkansas, California, Florida and Ohio.

In 2015, the Center for Medical Progress released a series of undercover investigative videos revealing the disturbing practice of trafficking in aborted fetal body parts for profit.

Planned Parenthood and its various affiliates were exposed participating in the sale of aborted fetal remains to biologic companies—most notably, StemExpress.

The videos, which have been validated as authentic and free of manipulation by an independent forensic analysis, feature conversations in which representatives from Planned Parenthood and its affiliates discuss the type of fetal organs to be harvested and negotiate the price of selling them.

Lawmakers and the American public were justifiably shocked and disgusted by both the practice of selling human remains for profit and the graphic and often flippant nature of the

conversations.

After publication of the videos and the ensuing public outcry, Congress established the House Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives to investigate the sale and trafficking of fetal organs and tissue by abortion providers. The House of Representatives recently voted to extend the work of this panel, which is chaired by Rep. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee.

Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider, receives over \$500 million in federal tax money each year, despite reporting over \$700 billion in nongovernmental revenue in its 2014-2015 annual report and being vastly outnumbered (20 to 1) by free or low-cost community health centers.

Since the fetal tissue scandal in 2015, efforts to channel taxpayer dollars away from Planned Parenthood to comprehensive health care facilities that do not perform abortions have gained considerable momentum—though the legislative goal has not yet been achieved.

Section 289g-2 of the U.S. Code was enacted to prevent people or organizations from profiting from the sale of fetal remains.

This law prohibits the sale of any human fetal tissue for valuable consideration if it affects interstate commerce. While reimbursements for costs associated with the donation of fetal tissue are permissible, profiting from such a sale is not.

When addressing the purpose of the fetal tissue law, the lead sponsor, Democrat Henry Waxman, commented, "It would be abhorrent to allow for the sale of fetal tissue and a market to be created for that sale."

The Center for Medical Progress videos reveal multiple conversations regarding payments and other considerations to be received in exchange for fetal tissue. This included a

revealing exchange with Melissa Farrell, director of research at Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast—the facility for which the select panel requested a criminal investigation.

In the video released in August 2015, Farrell discusses the fact that because the Houston-based abortion agency is such a “high-volume” abortion facility, it provides a significant amount of fetal tissue to various biologic companies.

Farrell went on to express concern about current fetal tissue laws and explained that the books could be altered to hide the financial benefit to Planned Parenthood. Additionally, Farrell discusses the willingness of abortion providers to “alter the process” to “obtain intact cadavers.”

The creation of a for-profit market for human remains is unethical and unconscionable. The American public has been rightly outraged by the pervasiveness of this practice, and is opposed to taxpayer dollars funding organizations that participate in such a market.

A survey conducted in August 2015 by The Heritage Foundation found that 78 percent of Americans believe that government should not fund organizations that harvest and sell fetal tissue from abortions.

Planned Parenthood’s 2014-2015 report noted an increase in the percentage of services associated with abortion, while the percentage of other medical services provided by the agency decreased.

Though the Hyde Amendment technically prohibits Planned Parenthood from using federal funds to pay for abortion, there exists no method of independent accountability ensuring federal funds are kept separate.

Planned Parenthood is left to police itself, an entirely ineffective safeguard. The disbursement of taxpayer dollars to abortion providers, no matter where spent, frees up other

funds to be used for abortion-related services.

The House Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives is performing a valuable service to Americans in initiating criminal investigations into the practice of profiting from the sale of fetal remains. The American public has every right to know whether its hard-earned tax dollars are being spent on organizations involved in illegal and unethical behavior.

Considering Planned Parenthood's involvement in the sale of fetal tissue, the decline of the provision of medical services outside abortion, and the inexcusable lack of accountability of federal funds received, a renewed push to stop federal funding of Planned Parenthood is in order.

The funds currently being received by the lucrative nonprofit would, no doubt, be better spent supporting community health centers that provide comprehensive care to families without offering abortion services. {eo}

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