

Presidential Candidates Speak Out Against Planned Parenthood, Call for Defense of Unborn Lives at Values Voter Summit

Thousands of Christian conservatives gathered in Washington, D.C., over the past three days, as presidential candidates sought their grass-roots support for the 2016 election. Late Saturday, Sen. Ted Cruz won the straw poll of attendees at this 10th annual Values Voter Summit with three other candidates also in double digits.

While the straw poll indicates a measure of evangelical support, these results are far from the only newsworthy aspect of the summit. On Friday, as the summit was carried live on several national TV networks, social media trends indicated the event as one of the nation's most-discussed topics.

Many candidates—including Sen. Marco Rubio, Cruz, Gov. Mike Huckabee, former Sen. Rick Santorum and Gov. Bobby Jindal—delivered their most comprehensive remarks to date on the sanctity of human life, forcefully calling for the federal government to cut off all taxpayer funding to Planned Parenthood.

The attention on Planned Parenthood comes in the wake of an undercover video investigation by the Center for Medical Progress. Since July, the group has released 10 short videos online (as well as complete unedited footage) purporting to show illegal activity taking place at the nation's largest provider of abortion services. The center's founder, 26-year-old citizen journalist David Daleiden, also spoke at the

summit.

Two candidates, Ben Carson and Donald Trump, addressed the summit though centered their remarks on foreign policy and cultural issues without addressing pro-life concerns.

FRC Action noted that all other candidates were invited—notably former Governor Jeb Bush, Governor Chris Christie and Carly Fiorina, who continue to perform well in national polls—yet declined to attend.

The first of many candidates to address these more than 2,600 influential activists, Sen. Marco Rubio took the opportunity to announce a breaking news story happening only miles away in the United States Congress.

“Just a few minutes ago, Speaker John Boehner announced that he will be resigning,” said Rubio. The large crowd of pro-life advocates erupted in thunderous cheering. Rubio continued, “The time has come to turn the page and allow a new generation of leadership in this country.”

Over the coming days and weeks, many high-level meetings among U.S. House leadership are expected to determine how the principal positions in Congress will shift—ultimately, to be voted on by all 435 Representatives in the House.

Tony Perkins, president of Family Research Council Action, which hosts the annual summit, offered his take on why this shift matters to the pro-life movement. He stated, “American voters who put the Republican Party into the majority have grown weary of GOP leaders running into these political battles waving a white flag.

“If Republicans will not fight to end taxpayer funding for an organization that is trafficking in baby body parts, and possibly infanticide, what will they fight for?” Perkins asked. “We welcome Republican leadership that understands that some values, like life, religious liberty and national defense

are worth fighting for—no matter what.”

Sen. Rubio addressed the current pro-life initiative Congress has been grappling with, the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act which bans abortions after a pre-born baby’s 20th week of development, as well as the Planned Parenthood scandal.

“By the year 2020, I hope we will be able to say that abortions after 20 weeks are illegal, that no taxpayer money is used to fund abortions here or abroad, and that Planned Parenthood doesn’t receive a penny from the federal government,” said Rubio.

While many pro-life members of Congress have echoed Perkins’ call to attempt to defund Planned Parenthood using every available legislative means, some voices even at Values Voter Summit expressed doubts on the feasibility of this strategy.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, lead sponsor of the Pain-Capable bill, noted defunding Planned Parenthood only in a future context rather than as a present battle.

He said during his Saturday morning speech, “I see a day when Planned Parenthood is defunded, and it goes like this: The House defunds Planned Parenthood, the Senate defunds Planned Parenthood, and the president of the United States signs a bill that would defund Planned Parenthood.”

Soon after Rubio, Cruz took the stage in all his Texas swagger. He elicited much applause as he outlined what he would do on his “first day in office.”

Cruz said he will “instruct the Department of Justice to open an investigation into Planned Parenthood—and to prosecute any and all criminal conduct by that organization.”

Other candidates continued this theme. During his remarks, former Sen. Rick Santorum recounted a recent CNN interview,

where they discussed how Planned Parenthood has been breaking the law—specifically, a law Santorum himself was involved in crafting when he served in the U.S. Senate.

Santorum, whose daughter Bella was born with Trisomy 18, which can cause severe developmental difficulties, summed up his stance on the worth of every life: “We have been fighting these battles, I have been standing in the forefront for year after year after year fighting the battles on life.”

Another stalwart conservative leader, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee emphasized his track record in state politics—both as an outsider to Washington, and one who had faced down the “Clinton machine.”

He minced no words regarding his pro-life stance. “For 42 years, we have lived under the notion that it is a human right and privilege to take the life of an unborn child,” said Huckabee.

“Since it is a human being (in the womb), we already have the constitutional protection,” he stated. “It’s called the Fifth Amendment, which says there will be due process before you deprive a person of life or liberty.”

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal shared his own personal story related to the abortion issue: “I’ll tell you what we did in Louisiana, he began. We’re not just talking about defunding Planned Parenthood.”

“When that first video came out, we launched an investigation with the FBI. Then the other videos came out. We canceled their Medicaid contract, so they’re getting no taxpayer dollars in the state of Louisiana,” said Governor Jindal.

“They didn’t like that. They decided to come protest at my house in Baton Rouge,” Jindal continued. “Now, they’ve got a constitutional right to do that, but we’re Southerners. We

like to provide hospitality. We put big projection screens and cameras out there, and I showed those Planned Parenthood videos over and over and over.”

Aside from the candidates, other leading voices in public policy spoke with conviction on pro-life issues. Previous presidential contender Sen. John McCain opened the summit, staunchly defending the value of every life. “Our greatest moral obligation is to oppose the taking of innocent life,” said McCain. “The right to life is the most sacred of all. No other rights exist without it.”

Pro-life leaders Ryan Bomberger of the Radiance Foundation and Star Parker of the Center for Urban Renewal and Education used their personal stories as backdrops for exploring why the cause of life is gaining such traction among millennials.

Lila Rose, founder of Live Action, focused her comments on why her organization pursues undercover investigations of Planned Parenthood. She said: “This is a war. There are real victims; there are people who are dying. Over 3,000 children are being killed every day in this country, and mothers are being lied to.”

“When that’s being covered up, and it’s being funded by the government—over half a billion dollars per year—and no one is exposing it,” said Rose. “We are going there to try to bring justice to the oppressed. We expose evil and uplift the truth.”

As the three-day summit wrapped up, the next flashpoint over values issues came into view. A conflict over the continuing resolution looms large in Congress—specifically, whether it will include funding for Planned Parenthood.

Such a weighty issue demands specifics from presidential candidates, as conservative voters consider who will boldly raise their voice for the voiceless. {eoa}

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