

Republicans Battle Over How to Approach Planned Parenthood

Conservative Republicans in the U.S. Congress want to keep pressing the attack on Planned Parenthood by trying to cut off its federal funds, but Republican leaders are sounding wary with crucial tax and budget issues looming ahead.

After three weeks of controversy over the women's healthcare and abortion provider, Republicans are in disarray over their next steps in a fight that could run for months if it gets enmeshed in a budget debate on track to begin next month.

As the 2016 presidential campaign shifts into high gear, Planned Parenthood has come under attack from anti-abortion activists. Recharging a long-running abortion debate, the activists have posted videos online that allege the group makes illegal profits from selling body parts of aborted fetuses.

Planned Parenthood, which runs hundreds of health centers nationwide, says it has done nothing wrong and that the heavily edited videos are misleading and unfair.

Millions of women, many young and single, rely on Planned Parenthood for healthcare including breast and cervical cancer screenings. The organization says abortions comprise about 3 percent of its services.

Taking their cue from the videos, released by an activist group called the Center for Medical Progress, Republicans brought legislation to the Senate floor this week to cut off Planned Parenthood's federal funds. The measure failed.

Now some of the same lawmakers are demanding that Republicans

take another run at the same proposal after Congress returns in September from its August recess.

"I encourage my colleagues to continue to fight to defund this organization that places more value on the sale price of babies' body parts than it does on the sanctity of human life," said Senator Ted Cruz. He is a leader of the defunding effort and a contender for his party's nomination for president.

Senator John McCain, a former Republican presidential candidate, said he favors attaching a spending rider that would eliminate Planned Parenthood's annual government funding to must-pass spending legislation known as a continuing resolution (CR) this fall.

Asked if this risked a government shutdown fight with Democrats, McCain said: "I don't know what it risks ...I don't know what's worth it, or what's not worth it, but I support having it on a CR."

Moderates and Republican leaders have been stepping more cautiously. Asked by a reporter on Tuesday about "what's next with Planned Parenthood," Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell talked about oversight, but not defunding.

"We intend to engage in vigorous oversight, both in the House and the Senate ... The investigation has just begun," McConnell said.

McConnell also said he was willing to negotiate with Democrats about funding the government, and that he will not allow a government shutdown over funding differences this fall.

In September, after its summer recess, Congress will face a series of fiscal tests.

Budgets must be set for the new federal fiscal year that starts on Oct. 1. Certain tax breaks will expire if they are

not extended. A temporary patch for highway funding will run out. At some point the federal debt ceiling is expected to be hit again.

Eighteen conservative Republicans in the House of Representatives have said they will oppose any legislation that continues to fund Planned Parenthood.

Like McConnell, Republican House Speaker John Boehner has talked about investigations, but has not set a defunding vote. "The more Americans learn about Planned Parenthood's horrific practices, the easier it will be for Congress to defund them," a spokeswoman for Boehner said on Wednesday.

Democrats have vowed to block any legislation that defunds Planned Parenthood, and the White House has said that President Barack Obama, a Democrat, is also opposed to defunding.

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