

The 1 Issue I Hope the Pope Talks About in Congress

Last week, after a tenth video was released showing Planned Parenthood officials discussing the trafficking of unborn baby's body parts, the House took action. On Thursday, the Energy and Commerce Committee's Health Subcommittee, which I chair, held a hearing on two drafts of legislation to ban any service provider convicted of violating either the Born Alive Infants Protection Act or the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act from participating in Medicare, Medicaid, and the State Children's Health Insurance Program. These bills would also empower states to stop giving Medicaid funding to any provider whom they suspect of breaking these laws.

Back in January, on the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the House voted to stop giving Title X funding to abortion providers. We have also voted to ban abortions starting at the sixth month of gestation, something that is supported by 59 percent of Pennsylvanians.

Today, Pope Francis has arrived in the United States. There is welcoming ceremony with the president at the White House on Wednesday, and on Thursday, Congress will have the honor of welcoming the Pope to the United States Capitol, where he will address a joint session of the Senate and House.

He will be the first pope to ever visit the U.S. Capitol, and the first ever to address Congress. Soon after, he will come to Philadelphia for the World Meeting of Families. It will be an historic occasion. Only three popes have ever visited the United States at all. He will be the second pope to visit Philadelphia, after Pope John Paul II in 1979.

Pope John Paul II, in both his 1987 and 1993 visits, famously said, "America, you are beautiful and blessed in so many ways...

But your best beauty and your richest blessing is found in the human person: in each man, woman and child, in every immigrant, in every native born son and ultimate test of your greatness is the way you treat every human being, but especially the weakest and most defenseless ones. The best traditions of your land presume respect for those who cannot defend themselves. If you want equal justice for all, and true freedom and lasting peace, then, America, defend life! All the great causes that are yours today will have meaning only to the extent that you guarantee the right to life and protect the human person.”

Pope Francis, in turn, has eloquently made much the same point. “The defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems. Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defense of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be. Reason alone is sufficient to recognize the inviolable value of each single human life, but if we also look at the issue from the standpoint of faith, ‘every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offense against the creator of the individual.’

As Co-Chairman of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, I am well aware of this intimate connection between the protection of the vulnerable, and the protection of all human rights.

Many are already speculating as to what Pope Francis will say to Congress tomorrow morning. I hope that he will speak out in support of the important work we have done in the House to protect our children, and that he will say what he said as Archbishop of Buenos Aires in 2005: “□Defend the unborn against abortion even if they persecute you, calumniate you,

set traps for you, take you to court, or kill you. No child should be deprived of the right to be born, the right to be fed, the right to go to school.”

We will continue to defend every child, because every child is priceless, no matter how much money Planned Parenthood may try to make off of them.