

Secret video, outrage, and a revived US abortion debate

4 August 2015

Anti-abortion activists' secret footage of officials from the largest US family planning organization discussing use of fetal tissue for research has appalled conservatives, sparking fresh assaults against an iconic organization over abortion rights.

"A lot of people want intact hearts these days," says Dr. Deborah Nucatola, director of [medical services](#) of women's health organization Planned Parenthood, in a surreptitiously-filmed video in which she discusses the scientific demand for [fetal tissue](#) and the best abortion techniques for preserving vital organs.

"We've been very good at getting heart, lung, liver—because we know that, so I'm not going to crush that part," she says while picking at a salad and drinking red wine at a busy restaurant.

"I would say it's probably anywhere from \$30 to \$100, depending on the facility and what's involved."

The video was first aired July 14 by the Center for Medical Progress and followed by more clips.

The work belongs to pro-life activist David Daleiden, who describes himself as an investigative journalist and who under a false identity devoted 2.5 years to infiltrating health circles in a bid to prove that Planned Parenthood was involved in the "harvesting" of fetal organs.

His investigation rallied conservatives in Congress and on the 2016 presidential campaign trail, where historic enemies of Planned Parenthood jumped at the opportunity to help shutter the organization.

Planned Parenthood operates 700 US clinics, and 2.7 million patients walk through the doors each year for a multitude of medical services: contraception, HIV prevention, and screening for sexually transmitted diseases as well as cervical and breast cancer.

But it is the group's abortion service that makes it a primary target of the religious right.

About one third of the one million annual US abortions are performed in Planned Parenthood facilities.

Public funding represented some 40 percent of its \$1.3 billion budget last year.

According to decades-old law, federal funds may not be used for abortions except in rare instances.

But Republicans say this distinction is illusory, arguing it is a fiction to claim that federal dollars which keep an organization's lights on do not contribute to its abortion services.

Republican White House hopeful Senator Rand Paul and freshman Joni Ernst introduced a bill to eliminate all federal funding to the organization.

Nearly all Senate Republicans voted for the measure Monday, but Democrats blocked it.

Republicans argued the money would be redistributed to health centers that provided crucial women's services such as cancer screenings.

Democrats shot back that the network would be overwhelmed by demand from women nationwide who could lose access to Planned Parenthood.

"Do you have any idea what year it is?" Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren boomed on the Senate floor.

"I simply can not believe that in the year 2015, the US Senate would be spending its time trying to defund women's health care centers."

Abortion politics

Daleiden and his associates posed as employees

of a fake company, Biomax Procurement Services, claiming they were interested in entering the intermediary market between abortion clinics and medical research facilities.

Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in all 50 states.

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Fetal tissue is in high demand in research centers. The material is provided only upon a patient's written consent, and for-profit sale is prohibited, although compensation to cover costs is allowed.

But careless talk and a cavalier attitude by Planned Parenthood officials baffled some Democrats and plunged the group into damage control mode.

"The allegation that Planned Parenthood profits in any way from tissue donation is not true," said its president Cecile Richards, who apologized "for the staff member's tone and statements."

The storm has not abated. Republican governors of Florida and Texas have initiated investigations, as have two committees in the Republican-controlled Congress.

House Speaker John Boehner said the video made him want to vomit. Republican presidential candidates offered harsh words, including charges that Planned Parenthood broke the law.

The Obama administration "does nothing to an organization that cuts apart and sells the body parts of dead babies," former Texas governor Rick Perry said Friday.

Democrats, thrown on the defensive, have begun pushing back.

While initially calling the video "disturbing," presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton took up Planned Parenthood's cause, attacking Republicans for launching what she called "a full-on assault on women's health."

The White House Friday threatened to veto the abortion legislation.

But the case has boosted the pro-life movement, which has long battled at state level to increase restrictions on abortion clinics and believes ultimately it is possible to reverse the 1973

APA citation: Secret video, outrage, and a revived US abortion debate (2015, August 4) retrieved 22 June 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-08-secret-video-outrage-revived-abortion.html>

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