

US states move to cut Planned Parenthood funding

By Kate Randall
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Anti-abortion officials in a number of Republican-controlled states are continuing their drive to halt public funding for Planned Parenthood. The organization is the largest US provider of reproductive and other health services for millions of women, including cancer screening, HIV screening, contraception and abortion.

The moves follow the release last month by the anti-abortion Center for Medical Progress of a series of undercover videos that falsely claim to depict Planned Parenthood officials discussing the sale of fetal tissue and body parts for profit. The recordings were made secretly by abortion opponents posing as biomedical representatives seeking tissue for research, and were heavily edited.

A group of congressional Democrats has asked the Department of Justice to look into whether the Center for Medical Progress broke any laws, such as recording without consent. To date, however, US Attorney General Loretta Lynch has not committed to a probe of the group.

Coming down on the side of science and against religious obscurantism, the *New England Journal of Medicine* defended fetal tissue research in an editorial last week, writing, “Planned Parenthood, its physicians, and the researchers who do this work should be praised, not damned” because the research “has benefited millions of people worldwide.”

Fetal tissue donation programs currently exist in only three states—California, Washington and Oregon—and Planned Parenthood says tissue is provided to researchers only with the consent of patients and that charges reflect only clinics’ costs, not profits. Indicative of the spurious nature of the attack on Planned Parenthood is the fact that none of the states where officials are seeking to cut funding to the group

is included in this small list.

In Florida, on Monday, Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida sought an emergency injunction against the state health agency that had done inspections ordered by the governor and that cited three clinics as performing second-trimester abortions when they are licensed only for first-trimester procedures. The state used a definition of gestational age that differs from that used by medical societies.

Arkansas on Friday became the fifth state to attempt to cut off state funding for Planned Parenthood by ending its contract with the provider for services to residents covered by Medicaid, the health insurance program for the poor jointly run by states and the federal government. Arkansas follows Louisiana, Alabama, Utah and New Hampshire in seeking to cut off funding.

The Obama administration has notified Alabama, Arkansas and Louisiana that their actions may violate federal law, which requires that state beneficiaries of Medicaid be free to choose their health care providers. New Hampshire is seeking to cut state funds to Planned Parenthood, which means the move would not be covered by federal law.

Utah Republican governor Gary Herbert said Friday that the state health department and other state agencies would no longer distribute federal grant funds to Planned Parenthood, which a spokeswoman said include Medicaid funds.

On July 28, Republicans in the US Senate unveiled legislation titled “A Bill to Prohibit Federal Funding of Planned Parenthood Federation of America,” which seeks to eliminate all \$540 million in federal funding for the organization.

Continuing the Republicans’ vendetta against the group, on Friday the House Oversight Committee sent

a letter to Planned Parenthood demanding seven documents or pieces of information be handed over by the group by 5 p.m., August 28. The letter was authored and signed by Reps. Jasan Chaffetz, Republican of Utah, and Jim Jordan, Republican of Ohio.

Included among the requested information are cumulative funding records from 2010 to the present, Internal Revenue Service and other financial records, an accounting of all organization activities funded by federal funds, records by state of funding received from Medicaid, and a list of the 50 highest-paid Planned Parenthood employees and their total compensation.

The House Committee sent a similar letter to US Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Silvia Burwell, which read in part, “The Department of Health and Human Services provided a significant portion of the federal funds that Planned Parenthood received. It is not clear whether Planned Parenthood used any federal funds to support transactions involving fetal tissue.”

Center for Medical Progress and other conservative groups are seizing on the video “evidence” against Planned Parenthood to call for a government shutdown unless federal funds for the organization and other family-planning programs are stripped from spending bills for the fiscal year starting October 1.

The support among congressional Republicans for a threatened government shutdown and other actions against Planned Parenthood’s legal operations is a demonstration of the degree to which the entire American political establishment is beholden to the most backward sections of the Christian right.

Their aim is not a defense of “the sanctity of life,” but to strip Planned Parenthood of funding that provides vital health services to more than 5 million clients a year, 75 percent of whom have incomes at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

Planned Parenthood reports conducting an average of 300,000 abortions annually, about a quarter of all those performed in the US. While the 1973 US Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion, since then politicians of both big business parties have sought to restrict access to abortion for low-income women.

The howling of the anti-abortion fanatics in relation to Planned Parenthood notwithstanding, since passage

of the Hyde Amendment in 1976 federal funding for abortions through Medicaid has been barred unless the pregnancy arises from incest or rape, or to save the life of the mother.

With abortion services not widely available through Medicare, this means that the average cost of an abortion stands at \$470, a prohibitive and burdensome sum for the vast majority of working class woman.

Dawn Laguens, executive director of Planned Parenthood Action fund, in an interview, accurately described the motives of those seeking to cut funds from the organization:

“It is a serious and obviously coordinated attack to get rid of abortion in this country, to recriminalize abortion in the country, to destroy Planned Parenthood because Planned Parenthood stands up for women’s rights, freedom and ability to access care that women and their doctors decide they need.”

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