

Researchers and scientists subpoenaed in anti-abortion witch-hunt

By Gabriel Black
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A special congressional committee investigating fetal tissue research will soon issue 17 subpoenas on medical researchers and supply companies throughout the United States, the *New York Times* reported Thursday. The subpoenas will force major universities and medical suppliers to release the names of people involved in fetal tissue research, including researchers, students, laboratory technicians and administrative personnel.

The subpoena is a direct threat to the lives of these researchers and workers, who are conducting their work in a manufactured climate of fear, misinformation and hysteria.

Last November, Robert Dear Jr. shot and killed three people and wounded nine at a Planned Parenthood Clinic in Colorado. Dear claimed to see himself as a “warrior for the babies” and demanded, “No more baby parts.”

Dear had been heavily influenced by the release, earlier last year, of undercover videos that anti-abortion activists falsely claimed showed representatives of Planned Parenthood selling aborted fetal tissue for profit. The anti-abortion group used fake California driver’s licenses and a fake company to shoot footage secretly at several Planned Parenthoods.

Planned Parenthood has consistently maintained that it has broken no laws, that the videos in question were deliberately edited to be misleading and that the health group’s clinics legally received money to cover the cost of procuring, storing and transporting fetal tissue for medical research and made no profit. In October of last year, the group said that it would stop accepting such reimbursements.

In Texas, this January, a grand jury investigating this alleged misconduct cleared Planned Parenthood of all wrongdoing and instead indicted two operatives of the

anti-abortion group. Overall, 20 states have cleared Planned Parenthood of all wrongdoing or have not decided not to investigate it.

After the shooting in November, Vicki Cowart, president of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains, released a statement denouncing the environment of fear promoted by anti-abortion activists. She stated, “We’ve seen an alarming increase in hateful rhetoric and smear campaigns against abortion providers and patients over the last few months. That environment breeds acts of violence.”

This promotion of hate and hysteria is personified by Representative Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn, chairman of the House Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives. In her opening statement at a hearing earlier this month on Bioethics and Fetal Tissue, she placed the question of fetal tissue research in the context of the Nuremberg Code, adopted after the Nazi atrocities of World War II. She was slanderously comparing the efforts of researchers seeking cures for cancer, Parkinson’s and other deadly diseases with the prison doctors in Nazi death camps. Likewise, she suggested fetal research compared to forced organ transplants in China and forced sterilization programs throughout the world.

Ilyse Hogue, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, an abortion rights group, stated Thursday, “If heaven forbid an act of violence does occur as a result of this list being compiled, the chair of this committee and her G.O.P. colleagues will be complicit in that violence.”

After the failure of the state-led witch-hunts of Planned Parenthood, the congressional committee formed in the aftermath of the videos is continuing the effort to criminalize fetal cell research.

The vaccines for rabies, polio, shingles, chicken pox, rubella and hepatitis A were all developed using fetal

tissue. In the 1950s, for example, the polio vaccine was developed by injecting the virus into fetal kidney cells. Research has been conducted on fetal tissue since the 1930s.

David Moore, a senior director of government relations at the Association of American Medical Colleges, told the *New York Times*, “We’ve been trying to educate policy makers about why this research is needed and why it can’t be replicated in other ways.”

Fetal tissues are sought in a multitude of research areas because fetal cells grow quickly and are more likely to be accepted by the immune system of the recipient. In a letter to the congressional committee, Bernard Dreyer, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, stated, “Fetal tissue can help researchers replicate human systems that cannot otherwise be replicated. This type of research has helped improve our understanding of numerous health issues including early brain development, neurocognitive disorders, congenital heart defects, Down syndrome and other infectious disease such as HIV/AIDS and influenza.”

Several medical research teams have reportedly had to stop their medical research work in the past six months that involved fetal tissue because of the pressure from the congressional investigation—even though it has no legal power to enforce any restriction. A director at the Sanford Consortium for Regenerative Medicine in La Jolla, California told Congress at the beginning of this month that a project they have to cure multiple sclerosis halted. He stated that the research group had “basically seen the supply of fetal material dry up completely.”

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