

Congressional Republicans move to defund Planned Parenthood

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The past two weeks have seen a deepening of the longstanding campaign, driven largely by Republican politicians, to defund and ultimately dismantle Planned Parenthood. The organization is the largest US provider of reproductive and other health services for millions of women, including cancer screening, HIV screening and counseling, contraception, and abortion.

Late Tuesday, Republicans in the US Senate unveiled a bill 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. The legislation is co-sponsored by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, GOP presidential candidates Rand Paul, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, and over two dozen other Republicans.

The broad support for the legislation among congressional Republicans is an expression of the degree to which the entire American political establishment is beholden to the most backward sections of the Christian right.

Senator Paul, himself a registered ophthalmologist, appeared at an anti-abortion rally Tuesday and also called for a Justice Department investigation into whether Planned Parenthood violated federal law barring fetal tissue sales. Senator Cruz and GOP presidential hopeful Ben Carson, a retired neurosurgeon, also addressed the rally.

These moves comes after the anti-abortion Center for Medical Progress released a series of undercover videos that falsely claim to depict Planned Parenthood officials discussing practices of selling fetal tissue and body parts for profit, a federal crime.

The press release accompanying the first video, released July 14, claims that the footage, “shows Planned Parenthood Federation of America’s Senior Director of Medical Services, Dr. Deborah Nucatola,

describing how Planned Parenthood sells the body parts of aborted fetuses, and admitting she uses partial-birth abortions to supply intact body parts.”

An analysis by Media Matters of key portions of this first edited video demonstrates that the accusations levied against Planned Parenthood are false and the video is deliberately misleading. Extensive editing was done to the other videos as well, as the second is cut from roughly 75 minutes down to about 8 minutes.

David Daleiden, the male voice in the videos, is the founder of Center for Medical Progress and has long-standing ties to extremist anti-abortion groups. He was formerly the director of research for the discredited anti-abortion group Live Action, which also created deceptively edited undercover videos of Planned Parenthood abortion clinics. He is associated with James O’Keefe, another right-wing activist best known for creating edited videos that targeted Planned Parenthood and helped bring down ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) in 2010.

The edited videos have been utilized by the right wing media, in particular Fox News, to mobilize the Republican Party’s base of supporters, largely Christian fundamentalists, in preparation for the 2016 presidential election. On Tuesday, a network of college pro-life groups called Students for Life of America coordinated rallies against Planned Parenthood in roughly 60 cities across the U.S.

The Republican Party is not alone in its kowtowing to the Christian right. In a recent interview with the Manchester, New Hampshire *Union Leader*, leading Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, who has long postured as an advocate for the right to an abortion and has made much of her status as potentially the first female president, declared, “I have seen

pictures from them [the videos] and obviously find them disturbing.”

In the interview, Clinton never expresses support for Planned Parenthood, but rather calls for broadening the Republicans’ proposed congressional inquiry into fetal tissue sales, saying, “If there’s going to be any kind of congressional inquiry, it should look at everything and not just one part of it.”

Clinton’s backhanded support for the frame-up underscores the anti-working class character of the identity and gender-based politics of the Democratic Party. While Clinton uses her gender to further her own aspirations for the presidency, she simultaneously fans the flames of a right-wing conspiracy whose aim is to take away access to contraceptives, healthcare, and abortion procedures that would otherwise be unavailable to millions of working class women.

Around 40 anti-abortion groups, including March for Life, the Family Research Council and Americans United for Life, are planning a nationwide protest outside Planned Parenthood clinics on Saturday, Aug. 22, at which banners reading “Planned Parenthood sells baby parts” will be provided by the organizers.

The scope of services provided by Planned Parenthood is immense. They serve over five million clients a year, 75 percent of whom have incomes at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

In 2009, they provided 4,009,549 contraceptive services, 3,955,926 sexually transmitted disease services, 1,830,811 cancer related services, 1,178,369 pregnancy/prenatal/midlife services, and 76,977 other services, for a total of 11,383,900 services. Their doctors and nurses annually conduct around 1 million screenings for cervical cancer and 830,000 breast exams.

Planned Parenthood conducts an average of 300,000 abortions annually, or about a quarter of all abortions performed in the US.

Immediately after the 1973 landmark Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion, right-wing factions in both the Democratic and Republican Party began a decades-long campaign to substantively overturn this ruling, as part of a broader effort to cultivate religious backwardness as a base of support for a right-wing agenda.

This process was set in motion with the passage of the Hyde Amendment in 1976, which barred federal

funding for abortions through Medicaid, specifically targeting the program’s low-income recipients. Due to this reactionary measure, the cost of abortion has always been burdensome to working class women, with the present estimated charge averaging \$470.

Since then, numerous anti-abortion statutes have been enacted into law. Invariably, these laws rely upon pseudo-scientific arguments, and in some cases openly espousing religious conceptions. Throughout this campaign, the Democratic Party has postured as a defender of women’s reproductive rights, while consistently backing down both to legislative restrictions and outright terrorist violence against health clinics that provide abortion services.

The end result, according to The Guttmacher Institute, is that as of January 1, 2014, “at least half of the states have imposed excessive and unnecessary regulations on abortion clinics, mandated counseling designed to dissuade a woman from obtaining an abortion, required a waiting period before an abortion, required parental involvement before a minor obtains an abortion, or prohibited the use of state Medicaid funds to pay for medically necessary abortions.”



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