

Planned Parenthood Funding

Michael Sean Winters | Feb. 16, 2011 | Distinctly Catholic

The [assault of federal funding of Planned Parenthood](#) [1] by, among others, Congressman Mike Pence, is doomed to fail this year. Even if Pence gets the measure through the House, attaches it to an important, must-pass piece of legislation and therefore gets it through the Senate, I suspect Obama would use his veto pen to send the measure back to Congress. But, Pence is still right to bring his proposals up because Planned Parenthood funding seems to run counter to what is emerging as the "consensus of ambivalence" about abortion and its relationship to the federal government.

Planned Parenthood is both the largest recipient of federal monies awarded under Title X and the nation's largest abortion provider. As Pence says, if Planned Parenthood wants to receive government monies for its other activities, it should get out of the abortion business. I agree entirely.

The "consensus of ambivalence" around abortion is exemplified most clearly by the Hyde Amendment which prohibits the use of federal funds for abortion except in cases of rape, incest or when the mother's life is threatened. The Hyde Amendment stands at the very center of the abortion debate. With pro-choice advocates, Hyde says abortion should be legal. With pro-life advocates, Hyde says that abortion is a bad thing that should not be encouraged. That is where the center of the debate is because that is where the center of the electorate is. Applied to Title X, the logic of Hyde should require that money only go to organizations that do not provide elective abortions.

But, Pence must be careful. There is a slightly different logic for applying Hyde, one that insists that Planned Parenthood's activities on behalf of pregnancy prevention are, in fact, the best way to lower to abortion rate and that the failure of the government to fund those programs will actually increase the abortion rate. That is not a negligible argument: Moral arguments are concerned with our non-cooperation with evil but practical arguments must look to the consequences of our efforts to be morally pristine. If it is true that cutting off funding for Planned Parenthood would increase the abortion rate, which is an empirical claim, it should not be attempted. This debate reminds me a little bit of some of the debates about the merits of communism before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Who cares about what the theory says: Marxism in the early 80's could be judged by how badly people lived under its dictates, and that verdict was not favorable.

Curiously, however, Pence's attack has not invited anything like research from the left. Instead, I have been receiving the most dogmatic emails from the Democratic campaign committees, warning of attacks on women, by which the authors do not seem to include attacks on unborn women, just attacks on access to abortion. (I understand that politics is incremental, but no one in Congress is actually attacking a woman's right to procure an abortion: They are debating funding not a constitutional amendment.) Democrats may not agree about much, but the attacks on Planned Parenthood and other anti-abortion legislation has touched a nerve. Unfortunately, so many pro-life Democrats lost their re-election bids last year, there are precious few voices for life within the Democratic caucus this year.

Now, [an actress who plays a doctor on TV](#) [2] has taken up the pro-choice cause, inviting her viewers to recall a time that she cannot herself recall, the time before Roe, the time of back alley abortions. I do not know if the

scare tactic will work: In the 1960s, a lot of women, especially a lot of affluent, educated women, did know women who had procured illegal abortions. Young women today have no such direct experience. (Why anyone listens to actors and actresses on important topics escapes me.) Still, what the ad does show is that the culture war has not been won at all, let alone the political war. And, I am not sure that the attack on Planned Parenthood will help the cause in the long term if it is not done carefully. Totally de-funding the program is not careful. Remember, the consensus of ambivalence is just that - ambivalent.

A last note about the issue. I am no fan of Professor Robert George as many of my regular readers know. But, I think he penned a [fine essay over at Mirror of Justice](#) [3] explaining why the tactics used by the Live Action (in which they set up a "sting" operation at a Planned Parenthood clinic and videotaped it) are immoral and cannot be used. As he points out, lying, too, is intrinsically evil. (Indeed, there are hundreds of things that are intrinsically evil which is why Cardinal Burke's position on not giving communion to politicians who support intrinsically evil acts is so ridiculous.) Professor George is as vocal an opponent of abortion as I know, and his willingness to call out the Live Action tactics is admirable.

Source URL (retrieved on 05/25/2017 - 13:32): <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/planned-parenthood-funding>

Links:

[1] <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0211/49609.html>

[2] http://www.politico.com/click/stories/1102/edelsteins_abortion_rights_ad.html

[3] <http://mirrorofjustice.blogs.com/mirrorofjustice/2011/02/the-on-line-journal-public-discourse-under-the-brilliant-editorship-of-ryan-anderson-has-become-a-key-site-for-people-inter.html>