

Planned Parenthood Unmasked

by Joan Frawley Desmond

WASHINGTON — Above the chatter and clatter of a Los Angeles eatery, Planned Parenthood's senior director of medical services explained how she produced an abundant harvest of fetal body parts from a routine abortion. "We've been very good at getting heart, lung, liver," Planned Parenthood's Deborah Nucatola noted in the undercover video, which was produced by the pro-life investigative group the Center for Medical Progress (CMP) and went viral after its online release on July 14.

To fulfill an order for fetal tissue from medical researchers, experienced abortion providers will use "ultrasound guidance, so they'll know where they're putting their forceps," Nucatola continued, as she discussed the challenge of securing intact fetal organs. "[S]o I'm not gonna crush that part; I'm gonna basically crush below; I'm gonna crush above, and I'm gonna see if I can get it all intact." In subsequent videos released by CMP, those callous words are matched by graphic images of tiny human bodies and organs piled in petri dishes and the chilling testimony of a procurement technician who was directed to remove the brain of a fetus whose heart was still beating.

The videos revived a long-standing debate on the morality of legal abortion. In October, the House of Representatives voted to defund Planned Parenthood; and, in early December, the Senate voted to defund the abortion giant, though the measure is not expected to survive a veto threat from President Barack Obama. But the disturbing images and conversations also trained a spotlight on the conscience of a nation that has endured almost a half century of legal abortion and no longer shows much interest in reasoned moral discourse. "The most shocking thing, for me, was how clearly most Planned Parenthood abortion providers see that they are killing people," David Daleiden, the lead CMP investigator, told the Register. "Deb Nucatola's voice gets hoarser when she talks about manipulating a fetus' body to get the right organs. Savita Ginde sighs forlornly that a first-trimester baby is 'war-torn' as we examine him or her in the path [pathology] lab," he said. "I continue to be surprised at how blatantly corporate Planned Parenthood lies and tries to cover-up the secret truth that their providers must carry about the burden of suffering inherent in destroying little people."

'A Great Service'

Pro-life Catholic leaders and activists echoed Daleiden's judgment as they assessed the message and impact of the 13 videos. "The Center for Medical Progress has done our nation a great service," R.R. "Rusty" Reno, the editor of First Things, told the Register. "Their investigative reporting brings to light the way in which a culture of death dehumanizes both its victims and its perpetrators. The human person is sacred, and now we know how the culture of death commodifies the most vulnerable among us, treating what is sacred as something to be 'harvested.'" The videos exposed the truth that abortion involves the direct killing of an innocent human life, but they also shook Planned Parenthood's moral credibility as a "trusted health-care provider." After initially denying CMP's allegations that its businesses had trafficked in fetal body parts for profit, Planned Parenthood announced that its affiliates would no longer accept any reimbursement for fetal tissue provided to researchers.

"The videos have been very powerful," Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kan., told the Register, as he reflected on the disconnect between Planned Parenthood's public face as an organization committed to serving women and the offline discussions captured on the videos. "A profit motive drives a lot of the abortion industry, and Planned Parenthood is part of that," he concluded. He paused for a moment to consider how the videos might stir the consciences of the Planned Parenthood employees who appear in them. "It would be interesting to know how those who were interviewed now see this played back and what they think about it," he said. Archbishop Naumann noted that several former abortion facility directors left the industry after they grew disgusted with their work. In this jubilee Year of Mercy, he added, it is important to pray for this change of heart and reach out to those who seek forgiveness.

Political Tactics

Meanwhile, CMP's political tactics also drew Archbishop Naumann's praise. The staggered release of 13 videos "was a brilliant strategy" that kept the issue in the news and forced the nation's largest abortion provider to repeatedly reframe its message. "Planned Parenthood tried to dismiss the videos," said the Kansas City archbishop, "and then, at some level, they acknowledged the reality [the videos portrayed], while also discrediting them." Since July, pro-life lawmakers and activists have drawn the public's attention to the stream of videos that

portray Planned Parenthood leaders discussing fees for fetal body parts and explain how medical procedures can be altered to protect intact fetal organs. "Recently, we have seen horrific videos further demonstrating that Planned Parenthood has an appalling disregard for human life," Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., told reporters, defending his Dec. 3 vote to defund Planned Parenthood through a measure that was embedded in a budget reconciliation bill. "While I support women's health," he said, "there is no reason why taxpayers should be providing hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies each year to this organization."

The brutality on display initially prompted Hillary Clinton, a longtime supporter of legal abortion and the Democratic Party's lead candidate for president in 2016, to describe the videos as "disturbing." But Planned Parenthood and its partisans quickly moved to frame the videos as a gross misrepresentation of the facts, and thus dismissed the Center for Medical Progress' allegation that the nation's largest abortion provider had violated the law by selling fetal body parts for profit.

Maintaining the Pressure

However, pro-life lawmakers have kept up the pressure, and movement activists say the videos have clearly revived the long-standing campaign to defund Planned Parenthood, and, even more importantly, end the unlimited abortion license. "For 40 years, there was almost no oversight of Planned Parenthood: They had a 'political Teflon' that was tough to penetrate," Marjorie Dannenfelser, the president of the Susan B. Anthony List, told the Register. "The videos have changed that."

"We know babies are dying, but this was evidence that Planned Parenthood has absolutely no regard for the lives of the babies," Carol Tobias, president of the National Right to Life Committee, told the Register. "For the first time, we have a bill in the House and Senate that would take away 90% of federal tax dollars that Planned Parenthood receives," added Tobias. "We know the president will veto the bill, but we now know what we need to do to get a bill through Congress." Tobias applauded the explosion of pro-life legislation at the federal and state level, but pointed out that many Americans still have not seen the videos and that no one should lose sight of the ultimate goal. "We are looking at the end game: We want to stop abortion. We need to elect men and women who will change the laws and a president who will appoint judges to the Supreme Court who understand and respect the dignity and value of all human life," said Tobias.

Powerful Impact on Women

Beyond the political realm, Catholic pro-life leaders have also witnessed the videos' powerful impact on women who have had abortions and report a surge of calls to pro-life apostolates like Rachel's Vineyard and Silent No More. "We have to confront the denial. That is why this approach is right," said Father Frank Pavone of Priests for Life, who was struck by the callous language of some Planned Parenthood staffers who appeared in the videos. "You dehumanize yourself when you squelch your inner voice that protests this kind of action [like abortion]. Over decades, they have squelched this voice. They reminded me of [abortionist Kermit] Gosnell, sitting in the courtroom, smiling," during his criminal trial. But a sign of hope, said Father Pavone, is that post-abortive women who deeply regret their decisions and are healing with the help of Rachel's Vineyard have told him that the videos must be shown. "They say, 'It hurts us to see this.' But they are happy to bear it," explained Father Pavone, if the videos help dissuade other abortion-minded women from making that same choice.

Pia de Solenni, associate professor of moral theology and an associate dean at the Augustine Institute in Orange County, Calif., underscored the videos' power to change hearts. "This is forcing a conversation about abortion and what it is," said de Solenni. "People don't want to know what it is, just like people didn't want to know the details of racism or what happened in the Holocaust. It is an ugly, brutal conversation, but people have to face reality." Perhaps one measure of the videos' unprecedented impact is that CMP investigators face a lawsuit filed by the National Abortion Federation (NAF) that accuses them of committing "fraud," among other offenses. The NAF has secured a preliminary injunction, which prevents the airing of a video that allegedly includes "materials they illegally obtained at NAF's educational meetings," according to NAF. California Attorney General Kamala Harris has also initiated an investigation.

David Daleiden: No Regrets

But Daleiden clearly does not regret his decision to devote three years of his life to an investigation of Planned Parenthood's practices regarding fetal tissue — despite the fact that if he loses the lawsuit he could face fines and be forced to pay legal fees. "Five congressional committees, including the new Select Committee on Infant Lives,

are investigating the barbaric and heartrending actions of Planned Parenthood and their accomplices in their illicit baby-parts trafficking scheme," said Daleiden, who noted the ongoing "criminal investigations in multiple jurisdictions."

Further, in an unpredictable election year that has roiled political parties and voters alike, he pointed to CMP's affirmation of unchanging moral principles that must ground the body politic. "Classically speaking, politics is about who governs and to what ends. ... The videos speak to our deepest values about human equality and human dignity," he concluded. "It's a cruel paradox that the humanity of the fetus is not considered to be equal enough to our own to be protected by law, yet it is precisely their [the unborn's] equal humanity that makes Planned Parenthood ... and their customers hunt after their body parts like buried treasure."

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