

Lawmakers call for probes into Planned Parenthood video allegations

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Lawmakers are calling for investigations into a health care provider that has come under fire by anti-abortion activists for allegedly selling fetal organs for profit.

The anti-abortion group Center for Medical Progress claims that the Planned Parenthood foundation violated the law by selling the fetal tissue to medical researchers.

Planned Parenthood spokesman Eric Ferrero vehemently denied the accusations, saying that the tissue in question was donated to medical research—not sold.

“These outrageous claims are flat-out untrue, but that doesn’t matter to politicians with a longstanding political agenda to ban abortion and defund Planned Parenthood,” Ferrero said.

The controversial claims, captured in part on an undercover video shot by anti-abortion activists, caught the attention of House Speaker John Boehner, who said Wednesday that a congressional committee would investigate the claims. Boehner joined a chorus of lawmakers and governors who said they were appalled by the video.

“When anyone diminishes an unborn child, we are all hurt, irreversibly so,” Boehner said in a statement. “When an organization monetizes an unborn child—and with the cavalier attitude portrayed in this horrific video—we must all act.”

House majority whip Steve Scalise (R., La.), echoed Boehner’s call to action, and the House Energy and Commerce Committee announced it would investigate Planned Parenthood. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton also launched an official investigation Wednesday. On Tuesday, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, a Republican presidential candidate, announced investigations in their

respective states.

The video, which surfaced Tuesday, shows Deborah Nucatola, senior director of medical research at Planned Parenthood, discussing how to maintain parts of a fetus for medical research during abortion procedures. The Center for Medical Progress used two actors posing as employees at a biotech firm who met with Nucatola over lunch to discuss how to get access to the fetal tissue for research purposes. The center calls itself a group of citizen journalists dedicated to exposing injustices in the medical field.

The Center for Medical Progress' two main claims are that Planned Parenthood sells fetal tissue to medical researchers and that the abortion rights group violates the Partial-Birth Abortion Act, which prohibits late-term abortions and certain procedures. Planned Parenthood says neither claim is true.

With consent from a patient, Planned Parenthood can donate fetal tissue to medical researchers for stem-cell research, Ferrero said in a statement. The Center for Medical Progress claims Nucatola said the organization profits from selling these specimens—though she doesn't say it explicitly in the video.

"It's probably anywhere from \$30 to \$100, depending on the facility and what's involved," Nucatola said in the video.

Ferrero said the money she discussed is used as reimbursement for transportation.

"There is no financial benefit for tissue donation for either the patient or for Planned Parenthood," Ferrero said.

The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003 states that if a physician knowingly performs partial-birth abortion, he or she can be fined and imprisoned for up to two years.

"At several of our health centers, we help patients who want to donate tissue for scientific research, and we do this just like every other high-quality health care provider does—with full, appropriate consent from patients and under the highest ethical and legal standards," Ferrero said.

In 2007, the Supreme Court upheld the act in a 5-4 decision, stating that banning this practice does not put a burden on a woman's ability to get an abortion.

The use of fetal tissue for medical research started in the 1930s, according to the American Society for Cell Biology. Tissue used for this research comes from hospitals, non-profit tissue banks, and abortion clinics.

Scientists value fetal tissue because it can expand at a faster rate than adult tissue a trait that aids research in a host of areas, the society says.

Arthur Caplan, the director of the division of medical ethics at New York University, said the use of fetal tissue is outdated, saying embryo cells have become the norm for medical research.

Though Caplan said he believes the video was manipulated, he voiced concern that Planned Parenthood would donate fetal tissue to researchers.

Caplan referred to parts of the video showing Nucatola saying the organization would perform an abortion a certain way to retrieve organs in the best way possible.

“That’s big trouble ethically; you cannot do that,” Caplan said. “The only thing you should be doing is having the women central in what is best and safe and her, and you don’t think about what you should do about the remains until the abortion is over.”

Lawrence Hinman, a professor emeritus of philosophy at the University of San Diego, highlighted the issues with the makers of the video in an email.

“There is nothing to indicate that Nucatola wants to circumvent requirements about informed consent,” Hinman wrote. “Almost everyone would agree that informed consent is crucial, and I think it should be highlighted.”

He added that some women choose to donate fetal tissue from abortions, as “it allows something potentially good to emerge from what for many is a sad occasion.”

The video isn’t the first the Center for Medical Progress released of hired actors interacting with Planned Parenthood employees. It’s part of a project the group calls “Human Capital,” in which members try to investigate what they say are injustices and illegal practices within Planned Parenthood.