

The Federal Government, a Shutdown, and Funding of Planned Parenthood

There are no words to adequately express the horror we all feel over Planned Parenthood's harvesting and trafficking of organs and body parts from their helpless unborn victims. Our revulsion is intensified by the knowledge that the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA), the nation's largest abortion chain, receives tax dollars through federal, state, and local governments. The critical challenge before us is how to effectively channel our energies into concrete action that will actually save babies. We owe the victims nothing less.

There has been much discussion about whether Congress should refuse to pass a "continuing resolution" ("CR"), leading to a shutdown of the federal government, with the hope that President Obama would agree to a new law to block PPFA from receiving federal funds.

What is a continuing resolution, or a CR?

Congress is supposed to pass 12 separate appropriations bills each year, before the federal fiscal year begins on October 1. In recent years, disagreements in Congress, and/or between Congress and the president, have prevented enactment of these bills. When appropriations bills fail to pass, Congress often resorts to a "continuing resolution" ("CR") to keep a specific group of programs operating. The CR that cleared Congress and was signed by President Obama on September 30 put federal programs on "auto-pilot" until December 11.

Why can't Congress simply strike the portion of the CR that contains the money that goes to Planned Parenthood, and approve the rest?

Neither the recent CRs nor any other federal spending bills include "line items" that specifically designate money for PPFA. Rather, individual PPFA affiliates tap into funds from various on-going health programs. In order to deny federal funds to PPFA, a NEW LAW must be enacted to specifically block funding for PPFA. To pass a new law would require a majority in the U.S. House, 60 votes in the U.S. Senate to overcome a filibuster (or 51 votes, if the filibuster can be sidestepped) – and the signature of President Obama, a ferocious defender of PPFA.

Congressional Activity

The U.S. House has passed legislation to de-fund PPFA, twice. (The House has also passed a bill that would make it easier for states to remove abortion providers from Medicaid.) Senate efforts to pass similar legislation have been blocked by filibusters by Democratic senators who support continued monies to PPFA. Even if the Democratic filibuster barrier can be sidestepped (see below), President Obama would veto the legislation.

There is a possible route to pass out of Congress a bill that would defund PP, known as the "reconciliation bill." This once-a-year type of legislation, by law, is not subject to a filibuster and can pass the Senate with a majority vote. Such a bill cannot carry airtight language to totally defund PP, but it may attack their major funding streams, the so-called mandatory funding programs. If passed in the House and Senate, the bill will be sent to President Obama. National Right to Life strongly advocates that the 2015 reconciliation bill contain language to curb Planned Parenthood funding to the maximum extent possible.

Pro-life Legislative Action

We need a pro-life president in the White House to effectively defund PPFA. In the meantime, and until we overturn *Roe v Wade*, we can work to 1) pass a ban on abortions on unborn babies who feel pain; 2) protect living unborn children from dismemberment abortions, and 3) establish federal penalties for failing to care for a baby born alive during an abortion.

A more expanded version of this memo is available here: www.nrlc.org/communications/ppfundingbackground