



Planned Parenthood vs. Faith-Based Charities: A Double Standard

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Republicans are screaming for the defunding of Planned Parenthood (PP). PP uses some of the funding to perform abortions. Senator John Kyl of Arizona said, “If you want an abortion, you go to Planned Parenthood, and that’s well over 90 percent of what Planned Parenthood does.”

Kyl is either an outright liar or he is stupid. In fact abortions represent about three percent of PP’s activities. Furthermore, government funding, which represents about 36% of PP’s budget, cannot be used for abortions. But the defunders say that funding other PP operations frees up money for them to spend on abortions.

That’s an interesting argument, and I am glad that Republicans opened this issue. Funding organizations for one purpose can actually provide funding for other purposes that might not be in the public interest because it enables an organization to divert funding that was dedicated to a worthwhile cause, and use it for whatever nefarious purpose they choose.

George W. Bush started a program to fund faith-based charities. These charities perform secular functions, providing aid to needy and poor people. The government provides funds to many such organizations, some secular, others affiliated with churches. Opponents of government funding of faith-based charities have been pointing out for a long time that the funding of secular charities run by churches frees up money for religious functions, thus indirectly supporting those religious functions. Such support for religion is explicitly prohibited by the Establishment Clause in Article 1 of the US Constitution.

Way back in 2001, when Bush started pushing government funding for faith based charities, Cato Institute, a conservative think tank warned against it.[i] Of course, they were ignored. Churches all had their hands out in a New York minute. All those people who deplored government intervention prohibiting prayer in public schools were suddenly enthusiasts of government support for their church charities.

Many secular organizations were alarmed by this flood of money to religious organizations. Here is a very good articulation of the problem by an organization appropriately named Americans United for Separation of Church and State.[ii]

What’s really astonishing about this is the amounts of money involved. For PP, the total funding provided by various government agencies is about \$360M, a drop in the bucket. For faith-based

charities, you do not want to know. It is...um...to quote our fearless leader, it's YUUUGE![iii]
And it is a big step toward turning our government into a theocracy.

Liberals hate it. Secular humanists hate it. Conservatives hate it. Real conservatives, that is. So, who is pushing it? Do you need to ask? The Religious Right and their flacks in Congress. We need to shut this down. If churches want to run government-funded charities, they need to be totally separated from their religious operations, and subject to the same IRS auditory oversight as secular charities.