

Outside the Beltway

Abortion Funding ≠ Abortion Rights

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The Cato Institute's Roger Pilon makes an important point regarding **the ongoing debate about the House GOP's efforts to restrict funding for abortion and related services:**

Opponents of the push to deny federal funding to Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers will try to inflame the debate by characterizing the push as an attack on the Supreme Court's discovery of a right to abortion. But the issue goes much deeper and is perfectly generalizable: it's a push to get government out of one more controversial area of life.

Most modern liberals fail to grasp — or ignore — a fundamental principle of political theory, namely, that the more we do collectively, the more liberty is restricted and passions are inflamed. That's why classical liberals asked government to provide only “public goods” like national defense, law enforcement, and clean air. Abortions are private goods (for some). Under current law, women are free to seek them from willing providers. And others are free to assist those who cannot afford an abortion. But no one should be compelled to provide or pay for another's abortion. It's a matter, quite simply, of freedom.

This sentiment pretty much encapsulates my own position on this issue. Although I find the practice of abortion distasteful and would prefer that we lived in a world where contraception was more widely used, I'm generally pro-choice when it comes to the early months of pregnancy. For the most part, that's because I find the idea of punishing a woman for what is obviously a painful emotional decision to be troublesome and, when it comes right down to it, the moral weight in my mind comes down on the side of an actual living human being rather than an embryo or early term fetus. At some point, though, pregnancy reaches a stage where termination for reasons other than a threat to the life or health of the mother would seem to be inappropriate, especially if it's a stage where viability outside the womb is at least a possibility. Even then, I'm not sure that criminal prosecution is appropriate except in perhaps the most extreme cases. When it comes to public funding, though, I'm generally

opposed to the idea. This also happens to be the general political and legal consensus we've reached in this country on the issue, and it's the reason why there hasn't been any significant moves on the abortion issue from either side in some years.

The argument being made by many on the left that denying funding for these procedures is somehow an attack on women's rights, though, is simply false. First of all, nobody has a right to taxpayer dollars to begin with. Second, nothing that Republicans in Congress are doing would change the legal status of abortion in the United States. Yes, there are moves being made in some place that are clearly aimed at restricting abortion rights far beyond the limits that the Supreme Court has allowed in *Roe v. Wade*, and it's progeny, but that strikes me as an entirely separate issue from the question of whether or not someone is entitled to federal dollars for what is, in the end, an elective medical procedure. Notwithstanding what I said above about my own opinions on abortion, it's clear to me that no such entitlement exists.