**THE OTHER SIDE:**

**Pence Throws the Babies Out with the Bathwater**

**By Shannon Devereaux Sanford**

Are we still living in a sexist world? It seems so. Last Friday, February 18th, the House passed the Pence Amendment almost entirely by the Republican Party, with few (10 or 11, depending on what you read) Democrats voting for the Amendment. No surprise there. The Pence Amendment, named for Indiana Republican Mike Pence, would cut all $327 million from Title X which provides family planning for low-income Americans.

For those of you who don’t know, what it is cutting is federal funding to Planned Parenthood. That’s the target. I don’t know many women that would have voted for this. Planned Parenthood of America has consistently provided significantly needed services, supplies and information to women all over this country who want and need them, and the majority of women in this country recognize this.

But according to Republicans like Pence, it is only about abortion. A longtime anti-abortion crusader, Pence has previously tried to cut off Title X funding for any group that provides abortions. “The time has come to deny any and all federal funding to Planned Parenthood of America,” Pence has very publicly stated.

But Planned Parenthood is not just about abortions and neither is Title X. At least 90 percent of the appropriation of Title X funding is used for clinical family planning services as described in the statute and regulations (45 CFR Part 59 Dept.of Health & Human Services).

Ask a good number of women, both Democrats and Republicans, about Planned Parenthood and most likely they will tell you that at some time in their lives, they have been there, either as an uninsured college student or as a young working woman needing the support and services that Planned Parenthood provides. And while Title X funding is aimed at low income women, for years they have served women from all economic walks of life.  I for one, was raised in an affluent suburb and in my early twenties worked exciting city jobs (translate glamorous but low-paying) and Planned Parenthood was the place where I, and my friends went for safe and affordable services. And I am not talking about abortions (although that is a woman’s right, as well); I am talking about contraception and various yearly, required medical tests.

We have the right to choose, and that right gives us the choice to not use Planned Parenthood services, or to not have an abortion. It also gives us the right to choose abortion, or the morning after pill, or a form of contraception, or to walk into a Planned Parenthood facility. Providing funding for these services allows women to make the choice that is right for them, especially at the times they can’t afford it. Would a better choice be to have a baby and have taxpayers pay for raising it for the next 18 years?  Don’t we have enough unwanted, uncared for children in our society? Isn’t giving everyone – especially those who can’t afford to raise a child – the chance to make a choice in family planning beforehand, the better way?

This is about paranoid, arrogant Republicans who don’t know they haven’t a right to make decisions for women. The Title X family planning program is intended to assist individuals in determining the number and spacing of their children to promote positive birth outcomes and healthy families. The education, counseling, and medical services available in Title X-funded clinics sometimes assist women alone, but does include couples, which means Mr. Pence’s gender, who also benefit from those services.

Having no choice makes you a victim; being able to make a choice doesn’t.  Planned Parenthood allows women to make choices. Gloria Steinem, thirty or so years ago, published an essay, *If Men Could Menstruate*, saying if that were so they would brag about how long and how much and even tampons would be federally funded. If men could have babies the Pence Amendment would not be happening. This is not just a political debate; it is a sexist one as well.

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