

**Friday, April 25, 2008**

**Working for the good of the public**

David Nova

Nova is vice president of Planned Parenthood Health Systems Inc.

"Planned Parenthood enjoys a good reputation," is the opening sentence of Gerald McDermott and Carol Swain's commentaries against Planned Parenthood ("Working against the good of the public," April 18). It is one of their few statements that bear any relationship to truth.

Planned Parenthood has earned our good reputation despite commentaries such as theirs that denigrate our work and our mission. McDermott and Swain accuse Planned Parenthood of violations of state law and systemic practices of racism, which they claim are perpetuated by enormous taxpayer subsidies.

Their diatribe appears authoritative and meticulously researched as they cite numerous statistical data from the Guttmacher Institute. Yet, that research institution has already publicly discredited their misleading findings. Their commentary was first published in March in The Washington Times. In a subsequent letter to the editor, Lawrence Finer, director of domestic research for the Guttmacher Institute, responded by stating, "In promoting an elaborate conspiracy theory -- that black women's disproportionately high abortion rate demonstrates racism on the part of 'the abortion industry' -- Gerald McDermott and Carol Swain conveniently disregard the fundamental explanation for that rate, and they misrepresent Guttmacher Institute data in the process."

According to Finer, McDermott and Swain present "grossly exaggerated" data regarding the percentage of abortions that are provided to black women. They then misinterpret this data as evidence that Planned Parenthood is a racist organization "targeting black babies for abortion." In fact, black women do have more abortions than white women, yet not for the sinister reasons they state.

According to Finer, "the reason that rate is as high as it is -- three times that of white women -- is straightforward. Behind almost every abortion is an unintended pregnancy, and a black woman today is three times as likely to have an unintended pregnancy as her white counterpart."

Last month, the Centers for Disease Control reported that one-quarter of adolescent females, ages 14 to 19, have a sexually transmitted infection. The data further indicate that among black girls and young women, the rate is twice as high. One out of every two African-American adolescent females suffers an STI.

We at Planned Parenthood view these STI statistics as evidence of a public health crisis that we work every day to help resolve. Planned Parenthood is, after all, the largest provider of testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections. Nonetheless, our opponents often misconstrue statistics such as these as evidence of racism on the part of our organization.

Worse still, our opponents rarely propose pro-active, effective solutions toward advancing public health. In all their denunciations, McDermott and Swain offer nothing constructive to prevent unintended pregnancies or to lessen the plight of women, be they teens or adults, black or white. They fail to recognize that Planned Parenthood's good reputation has little to do with our provision of abortion and everything to do with

"prevention."

Prevention is the core of Planned Parenthood's work and mission. We do more than any other organization to prevent unintended pregnancies (and the need for abortion). We do more to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections. We do more to promote medically accurate, age-appropriate education that fosters responsible decision-making and greater communication.

Despite McDermott and Swain's claims to the contrary, we do so with limited taxpayer support. In Roanoke, we receive \$8,000 in public funding to provide pregnancy prevention education to teens. In our Blacksburg Center, we receive no public funding. In our Lynchburg Center, no public funding. In Charlottesville, no public funding. Rather, we rely upon the generosity of our supporters and our good reputation to ensure that women, couples and teens can access affordable reproductive health care. The truth is more public funding is needed, not less.

Raising a child is the most profound responsibility any of us will ever undertake. When young adults and teens do so deliberately and thoughtfully, they make the next generation better -- more wanted, more loved, more able to be cared for and planned for. That generation is then better able to do likewise.

Planned Parenthood will continue to serve our core mission of prevention. As long as we do so, our reputation and our support will remain strong for generations to come.

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