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Planned Parenthood and Fired Former Chief Mired in Escalating Dispute

Leana Wen, who was fired in July as Planned Parenthood president after less than a year on the job, is at odds with the group over the terms of her departure and the group's direction.



Leana Wen, fired in July as president of Planned Parenthood, is engaged in a sharp war of words with the organization as the terms of her departure are ironed out.

Jacquelyn Martin/Associated Press



By **Shane Goldmacher**

Sept. 14, 2019

Leana Wen, the recently fired former president of Planned Parenthood, appears headed toward an increasingly contentious exit, after accusing the organization’s leadership of trying to “buy my silence” in a dispute that threatens to prolong and magnify an acrimonious transition at the top of the nation’s best known women’s health care and reproductive rights group.

Dr. Wen has been engaged in two months of fraught negotiations over her severance package since she [was fired in July](#). She led Planned Parenthood for less than a year and accused the organization of withholding her health insurance and departure payout as “ransom” to pressure her to sign a confidentiality agreement.

She made the accusations in a barbed 1,400-word letter to Planned Parenthood’s board of directors this past week, which was obtained by The New York Times. “No amount of money can ever buy my integrity and my commitment to the patients I serve,” Dr. Wen wrote.

The public airing of internal discord comes at an inopportune time for Planned Parenthood as both the organization itself and its abortion services

have come under assault by the Trump administration and Republican-controlled statehouses.

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Planned Parenthood disputed Dr. Wen's characterizations.

"Dr. Wen's recent allegations are unfortunate, saddening, and simply untrue," said Melanie Newman, a senior vice president for communications at Planned Parenthood. "The attorneys representing the board have made every good faith effort to amicably part from Dr. Wen, and are disappointed that they have been unable to reach a suitable resolution regarding her exit package."

Ms. Newman noted Dr. Wen has remained on payroll during the negotiations and will be salaried through mid-October, with health benefits through the end of that month under COBRA. Ms. Newman said Planned Parenthood had offered Dr. Wen a full additional year of salary and health benefits "under terms that are standard and consistent with her employment agreement and any reasonable executive exit package."

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The dispute, in many ways, is a classic and familiar one: A fired executive seeking compensation and the organization seeking a non-disclosure agreement.

In a statement on Saturday, Dr. Wen said that, "There should be no dispute regarding the terms of my employment contract, which are clearly spelled out," and that she was disappointed her letter had leaked. People familiar with the matter said a Monday deadline had been set for Dr. Wen and Planned Parenthood to strike an accord.

The internal drama comes as Planned Parenthood is increasingly under external political duress. Last month, Planned Parenthood said it was [withdrawing from the federal program that provides services to poor women](#) rather than comply with a new Trump administration rule which forbids referrals to doctors who can provide abortions. The program, known as Title X, had provided \$60 million annually to the group.

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The board of Planned Parenthood fired Dr. Wen, 36, in July after sharp disagreements over [what officials there described as her abrasive and flawed management style](#). Dr. Wen blamed her sacking on disagreements [over her reorienting the organization further from abortion politics](#) and more toward its role as a women's health provider.

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In her letter, Dr. Wen wrote she believed that de-emphasizing “abortion care is the best way to protect it.” “However,” she went on, “there is a vocal minority” including many national staff and board members “who prefer a stridently political, abortion-first philosophy.”

Dr. Wen said she had “no desire to harm the organization,” though some of her July comments about the politics of abortion were quickly seized by conservatives seeking political advantage.

Much of her Sept. 9 letter focused on more personal matters. Dr. Wen accused the two board chairs of preventing her from addressing the full board and wrote that she had declined to sign “a permanent gag on my voice” when she was fired July 16, “despite extraordinary pressure and substantial financial incentives.”

Before her July termination, Dr. Wen and the board had been involved in weeks of intense negotiations, according to people familiar with the matter; around that time Dr. Wen also suffered a miscarriage. She wrote about that experience [in the Washington Post](#) without informing Planned Parenthood's leadership.

In her recent letter, she left open the possibility of legal action. “I have no desire to file claims against Planned Parenthood for defamation, retaliation, or discrimination,” she wrote ominously.

She said that Planned Parenthood was demanding her silence “in exchange for my contractually-guaranteed severance and continued health insurance coverage,” calling the efforts “unjust” and “unethical.”

Dr. Wen went so far as to invoke the recent Trump administration rules to accuse Planned Parenthood’s board of hypocrisy.

“It is deeply hypocritical,” she wrote, that Planned Parenthood, “would attempt to enforce a gag order on its immediate past President/CEO while fighting the Trump administration’s gag rule on Title X providers.”

Ms. Newman said Planned Parenthood had in fact “proposed language to reasonably meet her concerns about the scope of the confidentiality clause.”

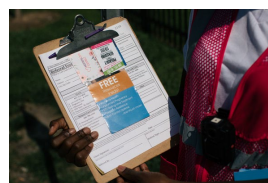
“We had expected to reach resolution and finalize the package in the coming days,” Ms. Newman said, alluding to its potential as a distraction at a pivotal moment. “Our work is more necessary than ever, and we have never been more committed to it than we are today.”

On Thursday, Dr. Wen posted [on Twitter](#) that she had a new position as a visiting professor at George Washington University and that she was pregnant.

Planned Parenthood

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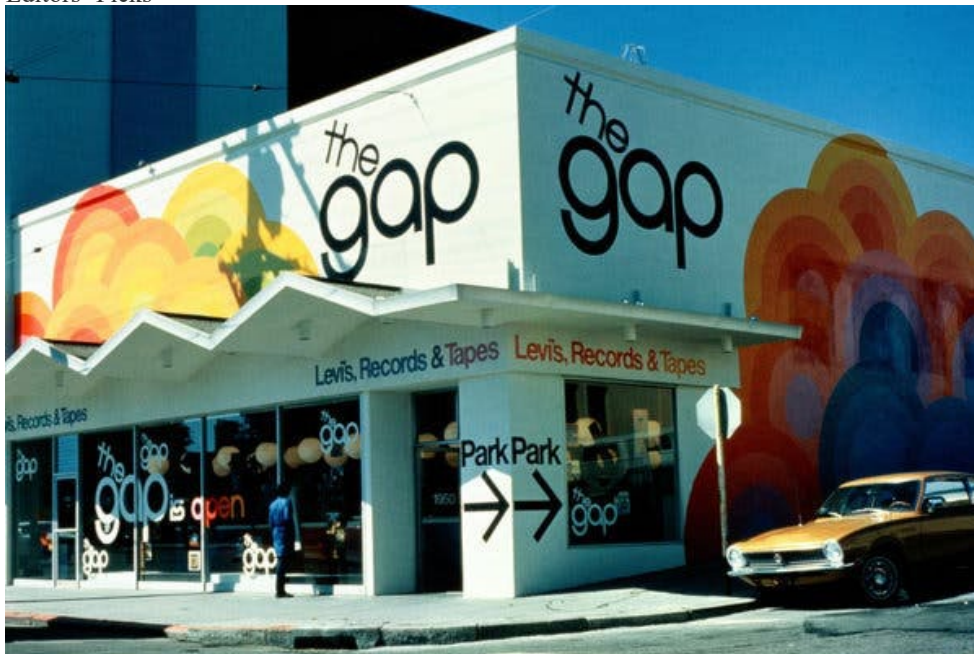
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