



Planned Parenthood stirs passions

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By Shelia M. Poole, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

NONE — There's little middle ground when it comes to Planned Parenthood.

To some, the organization is akin to an evil empire.

To others, it provides much-needed health and reproductive services to women, particularly those with little or no health insurance.

The spotlight fell on the national organization early this year when the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation decided — then backtracked — to pull its funding to Planned Parenthood for breast cancer examinations. Planned Parenthood's Atlanta-based affiliate played a part late last year in defeating a proposed “personhood” amendment to Mississippi's constitution. Most recently, the organization has been involved in fighting “fetal pain” legislation in Georgia that would ban elective abortions beyond 20 weeks. The state House passed the measure.

“I think there's confusion [over what we do] that has certainly been heightened this year,” said Kay Scott, the president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Southeast.

Scott said her group's focus is on “wellness, women's care, contraception, education and advocacy.”

“Abortion care is about 8 or 9 percent of what we do,” she said. “It's not 80 or 90 percent of what we do.”



harmful abortion, which generally kills babies and often leads to mental and physical problems with the secondary victims, the mothers,” said Alveda King, a niece of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and a player in the anti-abortion movement.

Janelle Yamarick, the community education and advocacy director for the Feminist Women’s Health Center in Atlanta, said her group considers Planned Parenthood Southeast as “partners and friends.”

“We work arm in arm and hand in hand on many issues,” she said, “specifically reproductive rights.”

While Planned Parenthood Southeast doesn’t receive any funding from the Komen Foundation, it did not escape the controversy.

The organization received many calls and emails from people who supported both it and the Komen Foundation, Planned Parenthood Southeast spokeswoman Leola Reis said.

“It was so emotional for people because breast cancer has touched so many lives,” Reis said. “Most importantly, we learned that people don’t want politics to interfere with women’s health.”

Planned Parenthood Southeast reported a small surge in donations — \$3,000 to \$4,000 —as a result of the dispute.

At Georgia’s Capitol, the organization’s influence goes beyond legislation aimed at abortion and contraception.

Planned Parenthood Southeast staffers and volunteers work to help women understand the legislative process and show them how to lobby lawmakers on issues that affect them.



Act, which would give workers with paid sick days the ability to use that time for family members as well.

It also provided an opportunity for some volunteers to speak out against the “fetal pain” bill.

Supporters of the legislation, House Bill 954, say a fetus is capable of feeling pain at 20 weeks and is viable, therefore the state has an interest in protecting it.

Opponents say the bill would legislate decisions that should be made by doctors, that it would force women to carry to term fetuses that will be unable to survive because of medical problems that only appear after 20 weeks and that it would place at risk doctors who work with difficult pregnancies.

In terms of money, Planned Parenthood Southeast would be considered a small player at the Capitol. Scott said its political action committee, Voice Choice, raised about \$25,000 in the last election cycle.

The organization as a whole operates on a budget of \$5.97 million. According to its 2010 annual report, 60 percent of its revenue comes from program service fees, 18 percent from grants and 4 percent from federal awards. The rest comes from contributions and special events. Donors include the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta.

Elizabeth Appley, an Atlanta attorney who focuses on working family issues, said Planned Parenthood Southeast is effective in dealing with the Legislature.

“I think they do an excellent job with advocacy in a very difficult environment,” said Appley, who has represented Planned Parenthood in the past. “They’ve helped people get engaged and to raise their voices with legislators on issues that they feel strongly about.”



“What they deem to be family planning is not a way to serve women,” Ward said.

King, who used to be a supporter of Planned Parenthood and makes no secret that she had two abortions when she was younger, said her view of the organization changed after questions were raised about the safety of “artificial” methods of birth control, such as the pill.

“Birth control is not health care,” King said. “Artificial, surgical, chemical and invasive birth control are threats to women. ... Planned Parenthood is a business. ... It’s up to me to decide whether they hurt me or help me. Planned Parenthood hurts women.”

Yamarick, of the Feminists Women’s Health Center, said Planned Parenthood Southeast is a “strong voice for women and access to health services.”

“Women should have services that they need in a dignified and compassionate way.”

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