

NATIONAL REVIEW

What Texas PolitiFact Won't Admit about the State's Defunding of Planned Parenthood

By Michael J. New — September 16, 2015

This Sunday, Texas Politifact released a review of some statements I made in a recent *Washington Examiner* editorial. In it, I noted that, as the debate over federal funding for Planned Parenthood continues, the experience of Texas has been instructive. After all, public-health data indicate that when Texas defunded Planned Parenthood, both the abortion rate and the unintended-pregnancy rate fell. This is consistent with a broad body of research which shows that funding for contraceptive programs offers little public-health benefit. Later, a *LifeNews.com* reprint of my article was circulated via Twitter by the office of Texas governor Greg Abbott, which came to the attention of Texas PolitiFact. Using extremely tortured and bizarre logic, it rated my claims about the decline in unintended pregnancies and abortions “Mostly False.”

Here are the facts: The Texas state legislature voted to remove Planned Parenthood from the state family-planning program in 2011. Because of various legal challenges, these funding cuts were phased in throughout 2012. Between 2011 and 2013, the state abortion rate in Texas fell by over 14 percent. Additionally, according to PolitiFact, preliminary data from the Texas Department of State Health Services indicates the number of abortions in Texas fell by an *additional* 15 percent in 2014. Secondly, between 2011 and 2013 both the pregnancy rate and the birth rate fell in Texas. Based on the data it seems reasonable to assume that the abortion rate and the unintended-pregnancy rate fell after Planned Parenthood was defunded.

All in all, the news is good. Important metrics of public health in Texas have improved. Of course, Texas PolitiFact had to find some way to put a negative spin on the legislature's decision to defund Planned Parenthood. As such, they offer three arguments to try to counter my claims.

First, they point out that the state of Texas does not collect data on unintended

pregnancies. While this is technically true, we can still make reasonable inferences about the unintended-pregnancy rate from both the Texas birth rate and the Texas abortion rate. Since both the abortion rate and the birth rate fell, it is certainly reasonable to argue there was a reduction in the unintended-pregnancy rate. In fact, the only conceivable way the unintended-pregnancy rate could have increased would have been for there to be sharp decrease in the *intended* pregnancy rate, coupled with a simultaneous increase in the percentage of unintended pregnancies carried to term. For obvious reasons, I find that very unlikely.

Second, PolitiFact argues the reductions in both the pregnancy rate and the abortion rate are part of a broad long-term trend. This is a fair point, but there have been countless predictions of doom should efforts on the federal level to defund Planned Parenthood succeed. *Washington Post* columnist Dana Milbank, for example, called the Senate vote to end federal funding to Planned Parenthood “The Abortion Promotion Act of 2015.” Terry O’Neil, the President of the National Organization for Women (NOW) said “the claim we can somehow replace Planned Parenthood overnight . . . is silly and specious.” Writing for Health Affairs Blog, GWU law professor Sara Rosenbaum stated that “a sudden cutoff in funding would create an immediate health care crisis for millions of women.” As such, the fact there has been no public-health crisis in Texas to speak of is both notable and newsworthy.

Third, PolitiFact states that I cannot prove that defunding Planned Parenthood caused the declines in unintended pregnancies and births. However, I never claimed that defunding Planned Parenthood actually caused the declines. I simply noted that the declines took place. Again, these declines in unintended pregnancies and abortion in Texas are important considering the significant amount of criticism directed toward Senate Republicans for their efforts to cut off federal funds to Planned Parenthood.

All of this clearly demonstrates the politicized manner in which PolitiFact evaluates the statements made by conservatives and pro-lifers. After Texas defunded Planned Parenthood, the abortion rate fell, and there’s also strong evidence the unintended-pregnancy rate fell. Texas PolitiFact deserves a rating of “Mostly False” for their misleading analysis.