

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE



Chairman Marsha Blackburn
114th Congress

SELECT INVESTIGATIVE PANEL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 2, 2016

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Opening Statement of Chairman Marsha Blackburn Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives Hearing on Bioethics and Fetal Tissue March 2, 2016

Welcome to all the witnesses who are here today. I will be introducing each of you in a moment and I look forward to hearing your testimony on Bioethics and Fetal Tissue.

The last decade has produced tremendous change in medical research and therapies. We are in the middle of a Biotechnology Revolution. Each week an announcement presents a new therapy or a new tool or a new possibility in the search for lifesaving cures for diseases and afflictions that cause untold pain and suffering.

New words have entered our vocabulary: three parent children, chimeras, CRISPR gene editing, and bioinformatics. Words like “organ transplant” and “tissue rejuvenation” seem like ancient history in favor of regenerative medicine, which might eventually reconstitute whole organs from adult stem cells. In a word, things are moving “fast”.

Like all revolutions, ethical questions and moral challenges can lag behind. But the new information and knowledge in medical science—raises important questions: “What does it mean?” “What about the historic principles of ‘Do no harm’, ‘Promoting disinterested decisions by medical professionals,’” and very importantly, “addressing the question of human dignity and personhood.”

Ours is not the first era to face such questions. The Nuremburg Code produced a human rights based ethics statement after horrible information was revealed about experimenting on humans without their permission. We learned, years after it was underway, about prisoners in China forced to donate organs or killed for their organs. We learned about the horrors of forced abortion and testing drugs on the poor and unaware after it happened.

We all remember the horrible reports about the syphilis studies on African Americans or forced sterilization of the mentally challenged years or even decades after it happened.

Last summer's videos revealed that something very troubling that is going on related to fetal tissue and research. The weak, the vulnerable, those with no voice – harvested and sold-- there is something going on, something that deserves investigating and that demands our best moral and ethical thinking.

This first hearing on ethics focuses our attention on procuring and transferring baby body parts and related matters. We will hear from professors who teach ethics, from medical practitioners, from those who do biomedical research, from those within America's faith traditions – so that we as legislators might become informed about the ethical implications and issues for: the woman who terminates a pregnancy, for the researcher, for the person who needs a cure, for the baby.

This is then about bioethics –we did not invite our guests here to debate election year politics, or journalism ethics or whether this Select Panel should be funded. I ask my colleagues to join me in focusing on bioethics so that we might hear the best testimony our witnesses have to offer.

Welcome and I look forward to hearing from each of you.

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