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Letter to State's Newspapers Regarding NDSU and Planned Parenthood

Dear Editor:

Let us get to the core issue in the debate about NDSU, Planned Parenthood, and the North Dakota legislature's actions.

NDSU's offense was not that it funneled federal money to Planned Parenthood for a sex education project that the organization was already doing, though that certainly should raise concerns.

NDSU's offense was not that it participated in a project that used controversial materials to train educators for the express purpose of expecting teachers to use those materials in our schools, though that raises troubling questions.

NDSU's offense was not that it participated in a project that promoted abortion. No one disputes that the curriculum did not discuss abortion.

NDSU's offense, contrary to its lawyers' narrow focus, was not that it may have violated state laws prohibiting state agencies from working with organizations that provide or promote abortion, even if it clearly violated the spirit of the law.

NDSU'S offense was that it partnered with an organization that conducts abortions. This is why the university's cries of academic freedom ring hollow. Academic freedom may protect the content of faculty research and teaching. Academic freedom may protect the methods used to pursue research.

No one, however, would seriously contend that academic freedom means that no restrictions can exist about with whom a university can officially partner. It is hard to believe that the university would allow a faculty member to partner with the Proud Boys, a hostile government, a terrorist group, the Klu Klux Klan, a money launderer in the Panama Papers, or Harvey Weinstein.

NDSU did not partner with an organization that does a few abortions incidental to other work. The particular affiliate of Planned Parenthood with which the university partnered conducted 6,451 abortions in 2019 in Minnesota alone. It did additional abortions in South Dakota. Nationwide, Planned Parenthood affiliates conducted 354,871 in 2019, making the network the nation's largest abortion provider.

These are not mere vices. Every abortion is, medically and scientifically, the intentional termination of a human life.

NDSU's offense was that it failed to respect the reality and horror of abortion. Partnering with an organization with so much death on its hands cannot be justified by "academic freedom." That is why the prohibition is in the law and why the legislature seeks to make the prohibition clearer with the new legislation.

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