

# Planned Parenthood didn't violate mandate

Community columnist B.J. Nikkel's Nov. 8 commentary said, "People sometimes see what they want to see and don't see what they don't want to see. It's important to respect the law ...." Indeed, but before Nikkel lectures us, she should first hold herself accountable to those principles.

State Auditor Dave Barba, whom even Republicans say is beyond reproach and well-respected, even by Gov. Owens, has proof that Planned Parenthood never violated the 1994 voter mandate. Voters didn't want taxpayer money paying for an abortion outright and they wanted to be sure no money would be "funneled" through the books into a clinic that performs abortions. Barba has emphatically said that Planned Parenthood has never violated the law, either by directly funding abortions or indirectly by "funneling" taxpayer dollars through the books into one of their abortion clinics.

No one, including Owens or Nikkel, has provided any challenge to Barba's audit findings of Planned Parenthood books. Instead, they employ the "lightbulb" theory, which says that it's "indirect" funding of abortions for poor women if state family planning money frees up Planned Parenthood private funds to buy a lightbulb for an abortion clinic. Anti-abortion extremists invented this theory, trying to re-define the voters' intent because they can't prove Planned Parenthood ever



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Soapbox

Planned Parenthood didn't need to spin off their abortion clinics into a separate corporation because they were in complete compliance with the law. However, putting aside their ego, pride and their knowledge, they were legally in the right, Planned Parenthood complied with "King" Owens' demands that they form separate corporations. They did that rather than put the lives of 15,000 low-income women in rural Colorado at risk, something Owens and Jane Norton, head of the Health Department, wouldn't be caught dead doing.

Nikkel paints Norton as a hero. No hero allows herself to be used as political cover or cares so little about other women's lives that she allows her boss to make them pawns in his political game.

In addition, Nikkel is clueless about how close these women came to losing the only health care available to them. I spoke to Dr. Jack

violated the law. Owens' and Nikkel's beef is with Barba, not Planned Parenthood. Challenging Planned Parenthood before challenging the credibility of Barba's audits of Planned Parenthood books makes this a political decision.

Berry, the president of the Colorado Medical Society, who believes rural Colorado faces a medical crisis because of a shortage of doctors. In January, the *Denver Post* quoted him: "Six rural counties have no doctors, 15 counties have no obstetric care and another 146 primary-care doctors are needed statewide." Dr. Berry told me his organization had supported Norton's appointment but was now very disappointed in Owens and Norton, and he had expressed such to them. It was clear to him that they hadn't bothered to find out if any health care provider was available for the women Planned Parenthood serves and if so could those providers afford the state's 40 percent reimbursement rate.

In the end, knowing all too well the landscape Dr. Berry described, Planned Parenthood's belief that no other provider was available was proven right when no other stepped forward with a bid.

Owens relented because he could no longer escape that fact. Suddenly his political career was in far more danger from the fallout of leaving these women without health care access than from the threats of the Christian Coalition.

Nikkel should respect the voters' intent, not try to re-define it, and respect the evidence that Planned Parenthood isn't and never has been in violation of the law. Nikkel owes Planned Parenthood an apology.

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