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Outcry Is Fierce to Cut in Funds by Cancer Group

By JENNIFER PRESTON and GARDINER HARRIS

The nation's leading [breast cancer](#) advocacy organization confronted the growing furor Thursday over its decision to largely end its decades-long partnership with [Planned Parenthood](#), with rising dissension in its own ranks and a roiling anger on the Internet showing the power of social media to harness protest.

All seven California affiliates of the organization, the Susan G. Komen for the Cure foundation, [released a statement](#) saying they opposed its decision. Twenty-six senators urged the foundation to reconsider its decision. And [a pledge of \\$250,000 from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg](#) of New York helped Planned Parenthood, which provides family planning and [abortion](#) services in hundreds of clinics across the country, to more than make up the money it lost.

"Politics have no place in health care," Mr. Bloomberg said in a statement, an echo of the complaints voiced by many women elsewhere. "[Breast cancer](#) screening saves lives, and hundreds of thousands of women rely on Planned Parenthood for access to care."

The deluge of criticism Komen faced on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Tumblr](#) came two weeks after online protests led Congress to suspend an effort to pass anti-piracy legislation that some in the Internet

community saw as a threat to online freedoms. It demonstrated again how social media can change the national conversation with head-snapping speed.

The furious debate is also a sign of the intense polarization of the nation's politics in a campaign season during which Planned Parenthood, led by Cecile Richards, has become a lightning rod for attacks from Republican presidential candidates.

Komen's founder and chief executive, Nancy G. Brinker, held a news conference Thursday and insisted that the organization's decision had nothing to do with abortion or politics. Rather, she said, it resulted from improved grant-making procedures and was not intended to make a target of Planned Parenthood.

"We think this is the right thing to do from a stewardship standpoint," Ms. Brinker said.

Her comments directly contradicted those of John D. Raffaelli, a Komen board member and Washington lobbyist, who told The New York Times on Wednesday that Komen made the changes to its grant-making process specifically to end its relationship with Planned Parenthood. Mr. Raffaelli said that Komen had become increasingly worried that an investigation of Planned Parenthood by Representative Cliff Stearns, Republican of Florida, would damage Komen's credibility with donors.

Komen gave Planned Parenthood \$700,000 last year — a tiny portion of its \$93 million in grants — to finance 19 separate programs. A growing number of religious organizations had become concerned that donations to Komen would benefit Planned Parenthood and had advised members not to give to Komen. Rather than risk offending some donors with a relatively small portfolio of grants, Komen decided to largely cut off Planned Parenthood, Mr. Raffaelli said.

To Planned Parenthood, that decision amounted to a betrayal of the organizations' shared goal of saving lives through breast screening programs. Ms. Richards, Planned Parenthood's president, said her organization was gratified by the support the controversy has brought.

"We provide care to one in five women in America, and over the last two days it seems we've heard

from every one of them, through Facebook, Twitter, e-mail and all sorts of ways, “ Ms. Richards said. “It’s a true show of women standing for women.”

Over 30 years, Komen became one of the most successful disease advocacy organizations in the world by making pink ribbons and the fight against breast cancer as prevalent a symbol here as baseball and apple pie.

Avoiding this kind of controversy was the very reason Komen chose a quiet ending to its relationship with Planned Parenthood, Mr. Raffaelli said. And he said Komen was bitterly disappointed that Planned Parenthood was using Komen’s decision to raise money.

The Komen foundation [posted a video on its Web site and on YouTube](#) with Ms. Brinker defending its decision.

But the video, which drew more than 2,800 comments and was viewed more than 39,000 times, did not appease the growing number of people online, mostly women, who decried what they view as the politicization of women’s health care.

Fueling the debate was news that [Mollie Williams](#), a top official at Komen, resigned after the board decided in December to withdraw funds from Planned Parenthood for breast cancer screenings and other services, according to people close to the Komen organization.

Ms. Williams, the managing director of community health programs at the Komen foundation, departed this month, just weeks after the decision on the funds. She was responsible for overseeing the distribution of \$93 million to more than 2,000 community health organizations.

Asked about Ms. Williams’s resignation, Liz Thompson, Komen’s president, said she could not discuss personnel matters.

Ms. Williams did not respond to requests for comment on her departure. In an automated e-mail statement, Ms. Williams did not provide a reason for leaving and noted she “must honor the

confidentiality” of her former employer. “However, anyone who knows me personally would tell you that I am an advocate for women’s health,” the statement said. “I have dedicated my career to fighting for the rights of the marginalized and underserved. And I believe it would be a mistake for any organization to bow to political pressure and compromise its mission.”

Dr. Kathy Plessner, a New York City radiologist and member of Komen’s scientific advisory board, said she would resign if Komen did not reverse its decision. “I strongly believe women need access to care, particularly underserved women,” Dr. Plessner said. “My understanding is that by eliminating this funding, it will jeopardize the women served by Planned Parenthood in terms of breast care.”

Komen’s decision prompted thousands of donations to Planned Parenthood and threats by longtime Komen supporters to toss their pink ribbons and no longer join its fund-raising walks and runs. Mr. Bloomberg has been a longtime supporter of both the Komen foundation and Planned Parenthood. According to his office, he has given \$555,000 to Planned Parenthood over the years. And he has given \$200,000 to the Komen foundation, much of it in the form of matching grants.

Kate Taylor contributed reporting.



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