

AlbertMohler.com

What Compromise? This Policy Leaves Religious Liberty in Peril and Planned Parenthood Smiling



Friday, February 10, 2012

President Obama walked into the White House Press Room today and attempted to pull a political rabbit out of a hat. Faced with an avalanche of mounting opposition to his administration's mandate that religious employers provide birth control to all employees, the President announced what his staff characterized as a "compromise." Was it?



After his opening comments, the President stated his new policy:

Today, we've reached a decision on how to move forward. Under the rule, women will still have access to free preventive care that includes contraceptive services — no matter where they work. So that core principle remains. But if a woman's employer is a charity or a hospital that has a religious objection to providing contraceptive services as part of their health plan, the insurance company — not the hospital, not the charity — will be required to reach out and offer the woman contraceptive care free of charge, without co-pays and without hassles.

The result will be that religious organizations won't have to pay for these services, and no religious institution will have to provide these services directly. Let me repeat: These employers will not have to pay for, or provide, contraceptive services. But women who work at these institutions will have access to free contraceptive services, just like other women, and they'll no longer have to pay hundreds of dollars a year that could go towards paying the rent or buying groceries.

This means that certain employers who have “a religious objection to providing contraceptive services as part of their health plan” will not fund these services directly. Instead, the insurance plan will cover these services without charge to all women employees.

What does this resolve? Well, to state the matter bluntly, nothing. At the end of the day, this “compromise” will resolve the issue only for those whose conscience can be resolved by an accounting maneuver.

The qualified insurance plans do not print the monies required to cover the birth control services mandated by the Administration. They will obtain these funds through the premiums paid by employers — including those employers with “a religious objection to providing contraceptive services as part of their health plan.”

Will this resolve the issue politically? That remains to be seen. As is often the case, what is presented in Washington as a compromise is really not a compromise in any meaningful sense at all. The very fact that groups like Planned Parenthood celebrated the “compromise” indicates that it was not a compromise at all — just an accounting trick.

There were several very interesting aspects of the President's remarks that should draw close attention.

First, President Obama said that he had earlier promised that “we would spend the next year working with institutions like Catholic hospitals and Catholic universities to find an equitable solution that protects religious liberty and ensures that every woman has access to the care that she needs.”

Interestingly, that is not at all what Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius said in her January 20 statement:

“Nonprofit employers who, based on religious beliefs, do not currently provide contraceptive coverage in their insurance plan, will be provided an additional year, until August 1, 2013, to comply with the new law. Employers wishing to take advantage of the additional year must certify that they qualify for the delayed implementation. This additional

year will allow these organizations more time and flexibility to adapt to this new rule.”

The Secretary ended that portion of her remarks with a final sentence, in which she stated that her department would “continue to work closely with religious groups during this transitional period to discuss their concerns.” Secretary Sebelius left no door open for a change in the policy, only a listening ear and “more time and flexibility to adapt to this new rule.” That is a far cry from what the President described today.

Second, the President steadfastly describes this controversy as a Catholic issue, and this is to his political advantage. He spoke of meeting with Catholic leaders and working with Catholic parishes and Catholic hospitals and Catholic universities. He never even mentioned any other church, denomination, or religious group.

The President wants to frame this as a Catholic issue, but it is not. The Roman Catholic Church is the major religious body that maintains teaching against all forms of artificial birth control, but those moral concerns are not limited to the Catholic Church. The mandated coverage would violate the conscience and deepest convictions of millions of American evangelical Christians and their hundreds of schools and institutions which, put together, outnumber Catholic institutions.

Third, the Obama Administration continues to frame the controversy as a concern about “contraception.” Millions of Americans naturally think of a contraceptive as a mechanism for preventing the fertilization of the woman’s egg. They are unaware that the word has been redefined in medical, pharmacological, and political contexts to refer to a mechanism for preventing either fertilization or the successful attachment of the fertilized egg to the uterine wall.

This is not merely a matter of semantics. Any intervention that prevents the fertilized egg from attaching to the uterine lining is an abortion. The Obama Administration has mandated the inclusion of the so-called “morning after pill” and other forms of “emergency contraception” in qualified plans.

Thus, only an accounting maneuver hides the fact that we will all be paying for chemical abortions under the President’s prized Affordable Care Act. Added to this is coverage for sterilizations.

Fourth, the President’s remarks today do nothing in the least to save the health care plans governed by religious groups. These include those smaller groups that self-cover their employee medical expenses and massive denominational insurance plans that cover hundreds of thousands of ministers, religious workers, and employees of church-related institutions. The current mandates threaten to kill one of the most effective and efficient means of covering the health care needs of millions of Americans.

Fifth, the President's remarks today betrayed a fundamental problem that lies at the heart of this controversy and his own thinking. He clearly sees the controversy as a matter of balancing a policy goal, on the one hand, and religious liberty, on the other. He even spoke of religious liberty as "an inalienable right that is enshrined in our Constitution."

But, just to state the obvious, a policy goal and an "inalienable right" are not to be "balanced." A matter of policy, no matter how urgent or important, must be reconciled to an "inalienable right." This does not mean that such reconciliations are easy nor that every claim of religious liberty is legitimate. Nevertheless, this controversy concerns the deepest convictions held by millions of Americans, and these convictions are rooted in over two thousand years of religious teaching. The President's remarks today do nothing of substance to alleviate this crisis.

Lastly, this controversy exposes the most fundamental problem with the inclusion of birth control in the Affordable Care Act, and this problem is not limited to any single government policy. This problem is endemic to our culture. Clearly, the President and his Administration are not alone in defining birth control as a form of "preventive care," putting the prevention of pregnancy on par with an inoculation against disease. That is the greatest outrage.

The President's inclusion of birth control as a form of "preventive care" also explains why Planned Parenthood president Cecile Richards was so pleased with President Obama's remarks today. She said: "Planned Parenthood's priority is increasing access to preventive health care. This birth control coverage benefit does just that."

So preventing the birth of a child is classified with the polio vaccine. As Cecile Richards declared, the Obama Administration's policy "does just that."

Anyone who celebrates this "compromise" as a victory is hiding behind an accounting trick. That accounting trick cannot hide the great moral tragedy at the heart of the President's policy — a policy that leaves religious liberty in peril and Planned Parenthood smiling.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler

President Obama's remarks are available [here](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/10/remarks-president-preventive-care): <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/10/remarks-president-preventive-care>

Content Copyright © 2002-2012, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

