

Catholics voters urged to press government to rescind HHS mandate

'Bishops can't tell politicians what to do, but Catholic voters can'

(CNS) -- It will be up to Catholic voters to convince the federal government to rescind a recent decision by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to go forward with a mandate that all health insurance plans cover contraceptives and sterilization free of charge, said Archbishop Charles J. Chaput.

"Bishops can't tell politicians what to do, but Catholic voters can," the Philadelphia archbishop said during a visit to Nashville. Political leaders respond to pressure from citizens, he added, and Catholics ought to demand respect for religious values.

Archbishop Chaput joined fellow bishops in urging Catholics in the pew to be more politically active.

"The very principle of religious freedom, the first freedom in the Bill of Rights, is at stake here," he said. "That's a lot to be at stake. Once it's lost, you don't get it back."

Although Catholic leaders vowed to fight on, the Obama administration has turned down repeated requests from Catholic bishops, hospitals, schools and charitable organizations to revise its religious exemption to the requirement that all health plans cover contraceptives and sterilization free of charge.

Instead, Kathleen Sebelius, secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, announced Jan. 20 that nonprofit groups that do not provide contraceptive coverage because of their religious beliefs will get an additional year "to adapt to this new rule."

"This decision was made after very careful consideration, including the important concerns some have raised about religious liberty," Sebelius said. "I believe this proposal

strikes the appropriate balance between respecting religious freedom and increasing access to important preventive services."

But Cardinal-designate Timothy M. Dolan of New York, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the Obama administration had "drawn an unprecedented line in the sand" with the decision.

"The Catholic bishops are committed to working with our fellow Americans to reform the law and change this unjust regulation," he added. "We will continue to study all the implications of this troubling decision."

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website includes a quote from Thomas Jefferson which reads: "No provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprises of the civil authority."

The bishops wrote that in the past, the federal government has respected conscientious objections to procedures such as sterilization that may violate religious beliefs or moral convictions

"For example, a law in effect since 1973 says that no individual is required to take part in 'any part of a health service program or research activity funded in whole or in part under a program administered by the Secretary of Health and Human Services' if it is 'contrary to his religious beliefs or moral convictions' (42 USC 300a-7 (d)). Even the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, which requires most of its health plans to cover contraception, exempts religiously affiliated plans and protects the conscience

rights of health professionals in the other plans. Currently no federal law requires anyone to purchase, sell, sponsor, or be covered by a private health plan that violates his or her conscience."

By "issuing a mandate for coverage of sterilization and contraceptives (including long-lasting injections and implants, and "morning-after pills" that may cause an early abortion) in virtually all private health plans," the Department of Health and Human Services has departed from this long-held policy.

Writing in *The Wall Street Journal* Jan. 25, Cardinal-designate Dolan said the HHS decision rejected the "loud and strong appeals" by "hundreds of religious institutions and hundreds of thousands of individual citizens..."

He said it is naive to think that contraception and sterilization will be "free" under the HHS mandate.

"There is no free lunch, and you can be sure there's no free abortion, sterilization or contraception," he wrote. "There will be a source of funding: you."

He said he felt "terribly let down, disappointed and disturbed" and found it difficult to reconcile the decision with what the president had told him during a meeting in November -- "that he considered the protection of conscience sacred, that he didn't want anything his administration would do to impede the work of the church that he claimed he held in high regard, particularly in the area of health care, education, works of charity and justice."

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El Departamento de Salud y Servicios Humanos retarda, pero no cambia determinación para cobertura de contraceptivos

Por **NANCY FRAZIER O'BRIEN**
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WASHINGTON (CNS) — A pesar de que los dirigentes católicos prometieron luchar por el cambio, la administración de Obama no ha hecho caso de repetidas peticiones emanadas de obispos católicos, hospitales, escuelas y organizaciones de caridad para que se revise la exención religiosa para la imposición de que todos los planes de salud cubran gastos de contraceptivos y esterilización sexual libres de cargo.

Todo por e contrario, Kathleen Sebelius, secretaria del Departamento de Salud y Servicios Humanos de los Estados Unidos, anunció el 20 de enero que los grupos que no son lucrativos que no proporcionan compensación por contraceptivos debido a sus creencias religiosas recibirán un año más de tiempo concedido "para que se adapten a esta nueva norma".

"Se llegó a esta decisión después de atenta consideración, incluyendo las preocupaciones importantes que algunas personas han presentado con respecto a la libertad

religiosa", dijo Sebelius. "Yo creo que esta propuesta establece un equilibrio apropiado entre el respeto por la libertad religiosa y el acceso amplio a estos servicios preventivos de importancia".

Sin embargo, el cardenal nombrado Timothy M. Dolan de Nueva York, presidente de la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de los Estados Unidos (USCCB, por sus siglas en inglés) dijo que la administración de Obama "había grabado una línea sin precedentes en plena arena" con el apoyo a tal decisión.

"Los obispos católicos están comprometidos a trabajar con nuestros compatriotas estadounidenses para que se reforme esta ley y se cambie esta ordenanza injusta", añadió. "Continuaremos en el estudio de todas las implicaciones de esta inquietante decisión".

Sebelius anunció la ordenanza y la estrecha exención religiosa el 1º de agosto del año 2011. Conforme su plan, después del 1º de agosto de este año (2012) para los planes de salud, nuevos o significativamente al-

terados, se requerirá que se proporcionen (al público) todos los contraceptivos que han sido aprobados por la agencia del gobierno del Food and Drug Administration, incluyendo algunos que pueden causar aborto, sin pago compensatorio ni deducible como parte del cuidado preventivo de salud para mujeres.

Las únicas organizaciones religiosas exentas de ese requisito serían las que llenen cuatro criterios específicos: "(1) que la organización tenga el propósito de inculcar valores religiosos; (2) que la organización emplee principalmente a personas que compartan los mismos dogmas religiosos; (3) que la organización les dé servicio a personas que compartan esos mismos dogmas religiosos; y que (4) la organización no sea lucrativa" conforme las secciones específicas del cogido del Internal Revenue Service.

Esas secciones "se refieren a iglesias, sus auxiliares integrados, y convenciones o asociaciones de iglesias, como también a las actividades exclusivas religiosas de

cualquier orden religiosa", de acuerdo con una anotación a pie de página de la ordenanza final interina.

Los grupos católicos, incluyendo a la USCCB, la Asociación Católica de Salud, y Catholic Charities USA, se refirieron a esa exención como demasiado estrecha, diciendo que se les requeriría a los grupos católicos que suspendieran todos los servicios para aquellos que no fueran católicos y que en forma inapropiada involucraría al gobierno en decisiones acerca de si una organización en cuestión "fuera o no lo bastante religiosa" para alcanzar la exención.

El anuncio de Sebelius provocó un gran clamor que indicó que los dirigentes religiosos no estaban de acuerdo y, al mismo tiempo, el anuncio provocó un suspiro de alivio de parte de grupos como el llamado Planned Parenthood y del grupo National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, que se han opuesto a cualquier determinación que debilite la ordenanza de contraceptivos o fortalezca la exención religiosa.