

Congressman: New HHS rule is an ‘obnoxious, unprecedented government attack on conscience rights’

By Ben Johnson

The nation's political leaders – including one of the most outspoken pro-life leaders in Congress – have dismissed [the new HHS mandate revision](#) as the latest attempt to coerce religious non-profits and closely held corporations into paying for abortifacient drugs, contraception, and sterilization that violate their deeply held religious beliefs.

The latest change allows religious non-profits to contact the government with their religious objection to the HHS mandate, and the government in turn will notify the non-profit's insurance provider of the need to furnish women with the offending drugs “free of charge.”

The penalty for entities that fail to comply is still \$100 a day, or \$36,500 a year, for each employee.

Congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey, co-chair of the Bipartisan Congressional Pro-Life Caucus called the new rule “just another highly coercive regulation — a direct, obnoxious, unprecedented government attack on the conscience rights of religious entities and anyone else who for moral reasons cannot and will not include potentially abortion-causing drugs — such as ella — or contraception and sterilization procedures in their private insurance plans.”

Arina Grossu, director for the Center for Human Dignity at the [Family Research Council](#), said the revised procedure “remains an insulting accounting gimmick does not protect the rights of Americans with sincere conscientious objections.”

The new proposal also seeks to find a way to force closely held corporations into a similar procedure, in response to the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby decision.

Grossu sees this as an attempt to violate the religious liberty of closely held corporations and a power-grab around the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby decision.

Grossu says the Obama administration is still “soliciting comment on new ways to force family businesses to violate their deeply held moral and religious convictions due to the HHS mandate in an attempt to address and skirt the recent Supreme Court ruling. However, the government's actions here still force family businesses to be complicit in what they view as morally wrong.”



U.S. Rep. Christopher Smith speaks at the Rally for Religious Freedom held in front of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit on May 8, 2014.

“This overreach by the Obama administration is intended only to ensnare family businesses back into the web of the mandate,” Rep. Smith said.

Grossu added, “The Family Research Council urges the administration to offer a full exemption from the mandate to charities and non-profits that have sincere conscientious objections and to respect the Supreme Court's ruling regarding family businesses

like Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Specialties.”

Meanwhile, Cecile Richards of Planned Parenthood objected that critics' objections are based in fanaticism.

“Once again, we’re reminded of the great lengths opponents are willing to go to put barriers between women and their birth control,” she said. “While the Obama administration is working hard to protect women’s access to birth control in the face of harmful Supreme Court decisions, today’s notice also serves as a stark reminder of what is at stake for women in this country when it comes to affordable basic health care.”

But religious leaders say both religion and the Constitution rebuff the revision.

Dr. Russell Moore, president of the [Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission](#) of the Southern Baptist Convention, said, “When it comes to these contentious issues I don't necessarily expect those who disagree with us to ask 'What Would Jesus Do?' But, in this case, asking 'What Would Jefferson Do?' would be a good start.”