

Obama to Repeal Bush Abortion Regulation

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FOXNews.com

Tuesday, March 03, 2009

President Obama intends to repeal a Bush administration rule that has become a flash point in the debate over a doctor's right not to perform abortions.

The regulation, instituted in the last days of the Bush administration, strengthened job protections for doctors and nurses who refuse to provide a medial service because of moral qualms.

A Health and Human Services official said Friday the administration will publish notice of its plans early next week, opening a 30-day comment period for advocates on both sides, medical groups and the public.

But Republicans are already voicing strong opposition.

"I will do nothing against my conscience in the practice of medicine ever regardless of what any law is at any time," Sen. Tom Coburn told FOX News. "And I can tell you that there are a lot of physicians that feel exactly that same way across the country."

Federal law has long forbidden discrimination against health care professionals who refuse to perform abortions or provide referrals for them on religious or moral grounds. The Bush administration's rule adds a requirement that institutions that get federal money certify their compliance with laws protecting the rights of moral objectors. It was intended to block the flow of federal funds to hospitals and other institutions that ignore those rights.

A senior Obama administration official told FOX News the Bush regulation is too vague and could prevent some professionals from offering a full range of services to their patients.

"This policy of potentially allowing providers to refuse to provide contraception or family planning runs counter to the [Obama] administration's goal of reducing abortions and unwanted pregnancies," the official said. "It also could lead into other areas of medical care."

The regulation in question falls under the Department of Health and Human Services. Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, who has a long history of supporting abortion rights, has been nominated to head up the department, sparking an outcry from a number of conservative groups who worry she may influence the repeal of this regulation.

FOX News' Shannon Bream and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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