

# HHS CRITICS GO OFF THE DEEP END

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on how opponents reacted to several new religious freedom initiatives:

The Trump administration's Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) took several welcome steps last week to roll back Obama era policies that undermined the conscience rights and religious freedom of health care providers.

The effectiveness of these initiatives can be gauged by the level of hysteria they provoked among pro-abortion, LGBT, and other assorted enemies of religious liberty.

Planned Parenthood—which, as the nation's leading abortionist, stands to lose its pipeline to state Medicaid family planning funds—said the new initiatives will be used “to deny essential, potentially life-saving care to people of all identities.”

Sara Kate Ellis, president and CEO of GLAAD, warned ominously of health care workers “denying a transgender person—or any person—life saving care if they walk into an emergency room.”

The new Conscience and Religious Freedom division announced by HHS “puts in place systemic, intrusive oppression,” wailed the National Organization for Women. It “is likely to promote a license to discriminate,” chimed in Sarah Warbelow, legal director of the gay advocacy group Human Rights Campaign.

“The new office...is meant to make it easier for people to discriminate, not to protect people of faith,” charged Kelli Garcia, senior counsel at the National Women's law Center.

Not to be outdone, the ACLU accused the administration of

“doubling down on licensing discrimination against women and LGBT people, all in the name of religion.”

Catholics for Choice vice president Sara Hutchinson Ratcliffe termed the religious freedom initiatives “a cheap attempt by President Trump to pander to ultraconservative special interests that got him into power.”

“This is the use of religion to hurt people,” moaned Harper Jean Tobin of the National Center for Transgender Equality.

Given such hysterics, one would think HHS was imposing a whole new set of draconian laws. But in fact, no new laws are being promulgated.

The new Conscience and Religious Freedom division of the HHS Office of Civil Rights (OCR), and a new HHS rule announced Friday, are designed to see that *existing* laws protecting religious liberty and conscience rights are vigorously enforced—something that was sorely lacking during the Obama administration. And far from *denying* life-saving care, these initiatives protect faith-based health care providers from being forced to *take lives* through procedures like abortion and assisted suicide.

Similarly, new HHS guidelines to state Medicaid directors simply restore state flexibility in excluding abortion providers, like Planned Parenthood, from Medicaid-funded family planning programs. This was the policy that existed prior to a 2016 Obama administration directive that forced states to include abortion providers in such funding.

The enemies of religious freedom all operated from the same dishonest playbook. They claimed that the HHS initiatives promote discrimination against women, gays, and so-called “transgenders.”

That is false. As OCR director Roger Severino made clear, during a Friday morning conference call joined by Catholic

League communications director Rick Hinshaw, the new initiatives do not target any group for discrimination. Just the opposite: they protect faith-based health care providers from anti-religious discrimination.

And that is what really enrages these promoters of religious bigotry.