

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS FOR HEALTH PROVIDERS: BUSH NEEDS TO ACT NOW

Catholic League president Bill Donohue discusses what's at stake regarding the religious rights of health providers:

"For the past several months, the Bush administration has been drafting regulations that would protect the rights of doctors, nurses and health workers from being discriminated against if they refuse to perform or assist in abortions, as well as other morally contentious procedures. At stake are the religious rights of these professionals. We urge President Bush to move quickly before the next administration begins.

"President-elect Barack Obama has pledged his support for the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA), a bill so draconian that it would jeopardize the right of Catholic hospitals and doctors to refuse to perform abortions. Now the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice has sent him a letter calling on him to make good on his pledge. But if he were to do that, it would lead, in the words of one Vatican official, to the 'equivalent of a war.'

"To put it differently, were FOCA to become law (it needs to be reintroduced in the House), the culture war that the Vatican official was referring to would come to a boiling point. In practical terms, this would mean the closure of every Catholic hospital in the nation: No bishop is going to stand by and allow the federal government to dictate what medical procedures must be performed in Catholic hospitals. Make no mistake about it, the bishops would shut down Catholic hospitals before acquiescing in the intentional killing of an innocent child. Were this to happen, it would not only cripple the poor, it would cripple the Obama administration.

"It is for reasons like these that the Catholic League urges President Bush to move with dispatch in instituting rules protecting the religious rights of all health care workers. If Obama wants to undo them, it will set up a confrontation he will surely regret."