

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COATS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. SHAHEEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

HHS CONTRACEPTION MANDATE

Mr. COATS. Madam President, I rise today to call upon the President of the United States to rescind one of the most radical and unconstitutional mandates ever issued, a mandate that requires faith-based organizations, hospitals, and educational institutions to provide and pay for health insurance coverage that violates the fundamental tenets of their faith.

Our Founding Fathers believed so deeply in the importance of religious freedom that they made it the very first American principle in the Bill of Rights. The first amendment to the Constitution reads, in part:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

On January 20, the Obama administration announced one of the greatest deviations from this constitutional guarantee of religious freedom in our Nation's history. This Federal rule is a blatant assault on the conscience rights of any organization or any individual who opposes abortion or the use of contraceptives.

While I am a pro-life Senator and believe that life begins at conception, I am not someone that supports banning contraception. But I do support the right of those who hold the belief that those tenets should be respected, and that Federal mandates, Federal regulations, and Federal laws should not be used to overturn that belief.

I do not believe this ruling was an oversight. The Obama administration doubled down on its ruling by ignoring the numerous efforts by faith-based organizations to be granted an exemption. This issue is not a debate over whether the use of contraceptives is right or wrong. This is not a debate over whether the health care law is the right policy or the wrong policy. I do believe personally that the ObamaCare policy is the wrong policy for this Nation. But this is a debate over whether the Congress is going to sit idly by and watch the administration walk all over freedom of religion—and not just the Congress but the institutions of America and the people of America—a core American principle or will we stand and protect what our Founding Fathers put their lives on the line for and what millions of Americans practice each day.

Catholic institutions, whether they be social services or universities such as the University of Notre Dame in

South Bend, will have one of two choices: they can either pay for health insurance that covers things such as sterilization or birth control, despite their deeply held religious objections, or they can refuse to offer any sort of health insurance to their employees, which will result in these organizations facing significant fines and penalties while their employees are forced to seek health insurance elsewhere.

In other words, the Obama administration is saying: Compromise your religious beliefs to comply with our massive Federal health care law or you and your employees will face a penalty.

While this decision will greatly impact many in the Catholic faith, it will also extend beyond a singular religious denomination. A wide variety of religious institutions and organizations across the country will resist providing insurance coverage for birth control. Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference on Catholic Bishops, said:

Never before has the Federal Government forced individuals and organizations to go out into the marketplace and buy a product that violates their conscience. This shouldn't happen in a land where free exercise of religion ranks first in the Bill of Rights.

Although a blatant violation of the first amendment, this ruling is a culmination of attacks on religious and faith-based organizations by this administration. I fear, as Washington Post columnist Michael Gerson noted in his article today, that such a trend will threaten the good work being done by faith-based groups—of any faith—whether it be Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or Muslim. Any group or non-profit hospital or charity that is working to provide services to people in need now has to compromise their basic religious tenets in order to continue to provide that insurance coverage for their employees or pay a fine by not doing so.

There have been some bills introduced in the Senate to rescind this. I would hope that those in the administration who are listening to the people and listening to the protests that are being made against this almost unconscionable mandate will not stand by idly and wait to see whether Congress will act because we will act. We will act as soon as we can. I would hope that they would reconsider this sweeping unconstitutional ruling which is in direct violation of the first amendment.

George Washington once said:

Every man, conducting himself as a good citizen and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience.

We must take a stand to protect this inalienable right, the right of conscience established by our Founding Fathers and sustained for over 200 years.

Mr. President, you can undo this wrong by rescinding this mandate that

has been imposed in violation of the most basic of human rights and principles of our Constitution. I am calling on you to do so.

I yield the floor.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam President, I ask that I be recognized to speak.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam President, I come to the floor today to add my voice in opposition to President Obama's unwillingness to respect the conscience rights of religious institutions.

On January 20, the Department of Health and Human Services issued a mandate requiring almost all private health insurance policies, including those issued by religious institutions, to cover free sterilizations and contraceptives at no cost to policyholders.

What this means, in simple terms, is that churches are exempt from the mandate, but institutions such as church-run universities, hospitals, and nonprofits must comply with the government regulation. Therefore, in order to continue to operate, these church-run institutions must violate the very beliefs that inspire them to care for the least among us.

I would not be surprised to see many of these faith-based institutions disappear should this mandate move forward. Despite the President's contention this outcome is not what he intends, his mandate unfairly forces people to choose between their health and their moral or religious values.

Many parents, Christians and others, object to sterilization, agents that abort, and contraceptives. Americans should not have to pay for services or health care plans that conflict with their deeply held religious beliefs. This is purely a political decision on the part of the administration, and it shows that President Obama will do whatever necessary to appease his base and protect his own job, even if it means the blatant infringement on first amendment rights.

With this mandate, President Obama is not only trampling religious liberties, he is also confirming what many feared when this health care bill became law. Americans saw this massive expansion of government as a threat to individual rights. This mandate, one of the first based on the President's health care bill, does little to comfort those concerns. In fact, it comes across as confirmation the President intends to force on us his belief that he knows what is best for Americans when it comes to our health care choices.

In an effort to fight the administration's overreach, I have joined with several of my colleagues in supporting legislation to protect freedom of conscience and prohibit the government from imposing mandates on our religious employers. Religious institutions play a critical role in our communities. If Federal policies make it difficult for those institutions to continue important social services without going

against their principles, it will hurt the least fortunate among us by threatening the much-needed assistance and outreach provided by religious groups across the Nation.

The seemingly endless number of regulations this administration has handed down to the American people needs to end. Let us force the President to govern in a manner that respects the values of the American people, not just his base. Protecting religious organizations from this overreaching mandate is certainly an excellent place to start.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

CHILD FARM LABOR RULES

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I am here today to raise once again a topic about how we raise our children in rural America, and I want to talk for a few moments about the proposed Department of Labor child farm labor rules.

Last week, we had perhaps what would be considered a piece of good news. The Department of Labor announced it would withdraw and repropose the parental exemption portion of their proposed child labor rules. I am worried, however, despite this good news, there are still a lot of consequences that will occur as a result of the proposed rules that are not being withdrawn, and there is no suggestion they are going to be reproposed.

The thing I want to make clear to my colleagues is that while the Department of Labor announced they were going to withdraw a portion of the rules, unfortunately, the majority of what is going to be offensive, difficult, and a challenge for our way of life in rural America remains.

Last year, of their own volition—no direction by Congress—the Department of Labor proposed a set of rules to put restrictions in place upon a young person's ability to work on a farm, including their own family farm. What we are talking about here is youth less than 16 years of age. Those rules, as proposed, would actually restrict the ability of a son or daughter to work on their parents' farm.

The current rule is that if your parents own a substantial interest of that farming operation, you can work on your family's farm. The rules as proposed by the DOL are going to narrow that definition, as follows: If your family operates in a family farming corporation or a limited liability company, these new restrictions would apply. Fortunately, that portion of the proposed rules the Department of Labor has withdrawn, and I assume they will be reproposing what their definition of a family farm is.

The point I want to make is that so much of the proposed rules yet remain, and the remaining portions of the rules still threaten to fundamentally alter agriculture as we know it today. If the DOL rules, as now proposed, go for-

ward, the education and training for the next generation of farmers and ranchers will be severely disrupted.

We have relied upon 4-H, FFA, and county extension programs to provide farm safety training and certification for a long time. The Department of Labor now says they no longer want those programs to qualify because they are too local. They want a national standard. They want to replace with a Department of Labor safety training program what has traditionally and very effectively occurred through 4-H, FFA, and county extension programs.

The Department has, in my view, ignored research that shows the programs we currently have in place with FFA and 4-H and county extension improve the safety habits of young people, and instead criticizes these training programs for being too locally driven and lacking Federal direction. Their solution is to nationalize these programs and have them run by the Department of Labor. In my view, local experts in our high schools, our FFA programs, and our 4-H clubs should be the ones conducting training programs and educating our young people. And parents and communities should be allowed to look after the best interests of their families and their communities and citizens.

The Department of Labor, in addition to attacking the programs that are in place, that are valuable to us in rural America, is also proposing to change the so-called agricultural hazard occupations. The proposed rules would prohibit a young person under the age of 16 from participating—even with the certification and safety training from the Department of Labor—in doing such things as rounding up cattle on horseback or operating a tractor.

The proposed rules say you cannot be involved in production agriculture if you are more than 6 feet off the ground. In today's environment, in today's agriculture, tractors and combines are 6 feet off the ground.

You can't clean out a stall with a shovel and a wheelbarrow. Those are things I am sure the 15-year-old does not want to do, but they are important to a family's farming operation, they are important to agriculture and of value to a young person in their training and developing skills that are important to them for the rest of their life.

They can't work in a pen with a bull or mama cow. Here is one that really stands out to me: No engaging or assisting in animal husbandry practices that "inflict pain upon the animal," such as branding, breeding, dehorning, vaccinating, castrating, and treating sick animals. The "inflicting pain" restriction sounds like something more than an interest—"inflicting pain" sounds like a different standard than really worrying about the young person's safety. These are important tasks that have to be done on a farm and that young people can safely do.

One additional example that stands out to me is that they are suggesting

in the rules that they would limit a young person's exposure to direct sunlight if the temperature reaches a certain limit once you factor in wind velocity and humidity. How does that work in the practical world of agriculture and farming today? For someone in Washington, DC, to propose rules that restrict a young person's ability to work on a neighbor's farm because of the amount of sunlight, wind velocity, and humidity is something that again, in my view, demonstrates a lack of understanding about how things work in the real world.

One would assume the Department of Labor, before making such drastic changes to farm labor rules, would have identified reliable evidence and data to show the need for changes. In fact, the Department of Labor admits it lacks the data to justify many of its suggested changes.

Furthermore, according to the National Farm Medicine Center, youth-related injuries from farm accidents have declined nearly 60 percent from 1998 to 2009. I have no doubt that if you ask a farmer or a rancher about the importance of safety, they would tell you that safety is a top concern, especially when they are dealing with a young person. But they would also tell you that critical to a rural way of life is being able to train and encourage the next generation to safely and successfully pursue careers in agriculture. If today's young person is not given the chance to learn at a young age what it takes to operate a farm, we put at risk the future of agriculture in our Nation.

I have always had a strong interest in agriculture. The economy of my State of Kansas revolves in many ways around the success of farmers and ranchers. Communities across our State are dependent upon the success, the profitability of production agriculture. But I also have known and strongly believe there is something more than just economics to family farms. This is the way that historically, in our country, in our Nation's history, we have transmitted our character, our values, our integrity, our love of life, and our understanding of how things work from generation to generation. It has worked. It has been an important component of our country's history, who we are as American people.

Today, across Kansas, when I visit with business owners, they tell me they love to hire farm kids because they have a different characteristic, a different makeup, a standard that is different from other people. They learn something about reliability and that work does not get done if you do not show up, that it is not about punching the clock to check in and to check out, that a calf is born at times that are inconvenient to a farmer. There is just a different set of characteristics a young person develops by growing up and working on a family farm. If these changes go into effect—and the rule as