

Publication: Jnl Final Edition 8/2005-today; Date: Aug 22, 2008; Section: News; Page: B6



## Proposal Shields Pro-Life Doctors Rule Would Allow Abortion Refusals

By Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration Thursday proposed stronger job protections for doctors and other health care workers who refuse to participate in abortions because of religious or moral objections.

Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt said that health care professionals should not face retaliation from employers or from medical societies because they object to abortion.

“Freedom of conscience is not to be surrendered upon issuance of a medical degree,” said Leavitt. “This nation was built on a foundation of free speech. The first principle of free speech is protected conscience.” The pro-posed

rule, which applies to institutions receiving government money, would require as many as 584,000 employers ranging from major hospitals to doctors’ offices and nursing homes to certify in writing that they are complying with several federal laws that protect the conscience rights of health care workers. Violations could lead to a loss of government funding and legal action to recoup federal money already paid.

Abortion rights supporters served notice that they intend to challenge the new rule.

“Women’s ability to manage their own health care is at risk of being compromised by politics and ideology,” Cecile Richards, president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, said in a statement.

The group, which had complained that earlier drafts of the regulation contained vague language that might block access to birth control, said it is still worried.

“Planned Parenthood continues to be concerned that the Bush administration’s proposed regulation poses a serious threat to women’s health care by limiting the rights of patients to receive complete and accurate health information and services,” Richards added.

But Leavitt said the regulation was intended to protect practitioners who have moral objections to abortion and sterilization, and would not interfere with patients’ ability to get birth control or any legal medical procedure.

“Nothing in the new regulation in any way changes a patient’s right to any legal procedure,” he said, noting that a patient could go to another provider.





LEAVITT: Regulation "about abortion and conscience"