

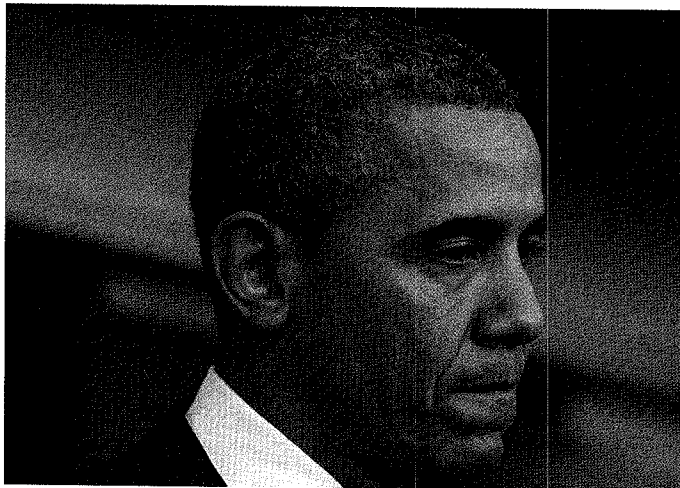
THE BEAT



PAGE 18
PRAEGER GOES TO BAT

PAGE 24
STRETCH IRAS UNDER FIRE?

Birth Control Mandate Spawns Controversy for Obama



by Arthur D. Postal and Elizabeth Festa

WHAT BEGAN AS A RULE to mandate contraceptive coverage through workplace health care plans has become a national conversation on religious freedom, the Constitutionality of health care reform, and the right for women to have access to birth control.

On January 31, the Department of Health and Human Services issued a final rule that would give nonprofit organizations until August 1, 2013 to comply with a new law requiring most health insurance plans to cover contraceptive services as part of preventive care for women, without charging a co-pay, co-insurance or a deductible. This includes employer-provided plans, even from organizations such as the Catholic Church, whose tenets

expressly forbid the use of birth control.

The final rule would have no impact on the protections that existing conscience laws and regulations give to health care providers themselves, but this did not prevent Cardinal-designate Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop

of New York and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops from strongly criticizing called the decision, noting that now sterilization, abortifacients and contraception are to be included in virtually all health plans.

rounding the White House's decision to force religious institutions to act against their beliefs lays that fundamental fact that the President's health law is unconstitutional to its very core."

Rep. Joseph Pitts, R-Pa., chairman of the Health Subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, added, "This outrage is one more reason why the President's healthcare law needs to be repealed."

In an effort to stem the controversy, the Obama administration switched gears with a new proposal that switched the onus of paying for contraception from employers to insurers, thereby taking religious groups out of the equation.

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"In effect, the president is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences," Dolan said.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, who is running for re-election, said "This is about religious freedom, and anything short of a full exemption is no compromise. The backlash sur-

services directly," President Obama said. "But women who work at these institutions will have access to free contraceptive services, just like other women, and they'll no longer have to pay hundreds of dollars a year that could go towards paying the rent or buying groceries."