

Bishop calls on Catholics to protest HHS decision

**By Michael Brown
Editor**

BOISE — Bishop Michael P. Driscoll is asking Catholics in Idaho to write to their federal legislators and “speak out for the protection of conscience rights and religious liberty that are essential to the common good of our nation.”

Bishop Driscoll was referring to the Jan. 20 decision by the federal Department of Health and Human Services to maintain a mandate that contraceptives, abortion-inducing drugs and sterilizations be available at no cost to the insured on all health plans.

“This means that health insurers will now be forced to include these immoral ‘services’ in their health plans and that every employer, including Catholic parishes, schools, hospitals, charitable organizations and social service agencies, will be forced to provide and pay for this coverage that is a clear violation of Catholic teaching,” the bishop wrote in a Jan. 27 letter.

“I also urge you to contact your legislators and ask them to do all that is possible to reverse this unconscionable mandate.”

The bishop did not seek a repeal of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which is being implemented incrementally through 2014 to provide health insurance for those who could not otherwise afford it. Rather, he is asking Catholics to demand the reversal of the HHS decision, which “rejected strong appeals made by hundreds of religious institutions and hundreds of thousands of concerned citizens who had vigorously argued against the mandate and encouraged a broader exemption that would include religious institutions and ministries.”

The bishop’s letter also was clear that the HHS mandate was not just an affront to Catholics, but violates constitutional protection of religious freedom. “As Americans and as Catholics, we are blessed with religious liberty which safeguards our right to live our principles and moral convictions. Our civil laws should fully recognize and protect our right, obligation and opportunities to participate in society without being forced to abandon or ignore the central moral convictions of our Catholic faith.

“Please join me in making your voice known as together we join other people of faith in rescinding this unjust Health and Human Services’ mandate,” he wrote.

Idaho’s congressmen

Rep. Raul R. Labrador
1523 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC. 20515
Phone: (202) 225-6611
Fax: (202) 225-2039

Rep. Michael K. Simpson
2312 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC. 20515
Phone: (202) 225-5531
Fax: (202) 225-8216

Sen. Mike Crapo
239 Dirksen SOB
Washington, DC. 20510
Phone: (202) 224-6142
Fax: (202) 228-1375

Sen. James E. Risch
483 Russell SOB
Washington, DC. 20510
Phone: (202) 224-2752
Fax: (202) 224-2573