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Obama reveals task force to reduce abortions

by Thomas C. Fox



President Barack Obama said on Wednesday that he had formed a White House task force to work with pro-life and pro-choice groups to develop policies aimed at reducing the number of abortions in America.

He also sent a clear signal to his abortion critics that the Freedom of Choice Act, which would lift abortion restrictions and to which he offered support as a candidate for the presidency, is not a high legislative priority.

Pro-life groups, including many Catholic groups, have been critical of the Obama administration during its first 100 days for being insensitive to their causes.

The presidential task force remark marked the first time the Democratic president, who, during the campaign leading up to his election, had said he would work to reduce abortions, let it be known that such a group had been formed.

"I would like to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies that result in women feeling compelled to get an abortion, or at least considering getting an abortion," the president said in a nationally televised press conference inside the White House, "particularly if we can reduce the number of teen pregnancies, which has started to spike up again."

?And so I've got a task force within the Domestic Policy Council in the West Wing of the White House that is working with groups both in the pro-choice camp and in the pro-life camp, to see if we can arrive at some consensus on that.?

The announcement came in an answer to a question during which the president clearly tried to dampen harsh criticisms he is insensitive to the unborn.

As evidence his critics point to his support for the choice act, his January executive order overturning the Mexico City policy that required non-governmental organizations receiving federal funding to refrain from performing or promoting abortions, and by his lifting of some restrictions on embryonic stem cell research.

During the press conference CNN Correspondent Ed Henry noted the controversy that has erupted surrounding the invitation by Notre Dame to the president to deliver the 2009 commencement address at the university in mid-May. That invitation that has triggered some 30 U.S. bishops to demand that it be rescinded.

Following his lead in to his question, Henry asked Obama if he still hopes, as he had indicated during his election campaign, that Congress quickly send him the Freedom of Choice Act to sign?

Some neutral observers have suggested the choice act has virtually no chance of making it through Congress. Yet it has been a flag raising, rallying cry for anti-abortion forces to portray Obama's support for the legislation as evidence he is a solidly ?pro-abortion? president.

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Obama appeared to try to repaint this portrait, saying that signing the choice act is not among his high priorities.

?Mr. President. In a couple of weeks, you're going to be giving the commencement at Notre Dame,? Henry said. ?And, as you know, this has caused a lot of controversy among Catholics who are opposed to your position on abortion.

?As a candidate, you vowed that one of the very things you wanted to do was sign the Freedom of Choice Act, which, as you know, would eliminate federal, state and local restrictions on abortion. And at one point in the campaign when asked about abortion and life, you said that it was above ? quote, above my pay grade.

?Now that you've been president for 100 days, obviously, your pay grade is a little higher than when you were a senator. Do you still hope that Congress quickly sends you the Freedom of Choice Act so you can sign it??

Obama said he wants ?to tamp down some of the anger surrounding this issue? and the choice act ?is not the highest legislative priority.?

He went on: ?You know, the ? my view on ? on abortion, I think, has been very consistent. I think abortion is a moral issue and an ethical issue.

?I think that those who are pro-choice make a mistake when they ? if they suggest ? and I don't want to

create straw men here, but I think there are some who suggest that this is simply an issue about women's freedom and that there's no other considerations. I think, look, this is an issue that people have to wrestle with and families and individual women have to wrestle with.

?The reason I'm pro-choice is because I don't think women take that ? that position casually. I think that they struggle with these decisions each and every day. And I think they are in a better position to make these decisions ultimately than members of Congress or a president of the United States, in consultation with their families, with their doctors, with their clergy.

?So ? so that has been my consistent position. The other thing that I said consistently during the campaign is I would like to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies that result in women feeling compelled to get an abortion, or at least considering getting an abortion, particularly if we can reduce the number of teen pregnancies, which has started to spike up again.

?And so I've got a task force within the Domestic Policy Council in the West Wing of the White House that is working with groups both in the pro-choice camp and in the pro-life camp, to see if we can arrive at some consensus on that.

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