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Conservatives rally across U.S. for 'religious freedom'

Chris Lisee | Jun. 11, 2012

WASHINGTON -- Hundreds gathered on Capitol Hill and at rallies across the nation Friday in a double-barreled attack on President Barack Obama's health care law and a mandate to require employers to provide insurance coverage of birth control.

Speakers such as Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., and anti-abortion activist Lila Rose rallied conservatives in one of 160 coordinated noontime rallies across the country.

Bachmann, a former GOP presidential candidate, emphasized that the fight over the insurance mandate is not about birth control or women's rights, but the freedom to practice religion without government involvement.

"This is about, at its heart and soul, religious liberty first and religious liberty always," she said. "We will fight this and we will win."

The rally comes on the heels of 12 lawsuits filed by 43 Catholic groups against the Department of Health and Human Services in May over the insurance mandate. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court is expected to rule this month on Obama's landmark 2010 health care law.

Rose, who's been criticized for her undercover tactics against abortion providers, said opposing the HHS mandate is not part of the "war on women," but instead, "The real war on women is what's happening every day in abortion clinics across the country."

"The women of my generation know better. We know that these kinds of activities do not liberate us, but can enslave us," she said. "It is a war against us."

The twin fights over religious liberty and abortion dominated the Religious Freedom Rally. Activists cheered as pastors and priests fiercely defended the importance of religious autonomy, the sanctity of life, and their support of fighting the health care legislation.

Diane Sachs of Chantilly, Va., said her Catholic faith requires her to take a stand against the birth control mandate. "We have the admonition, 'Don't be cafeteria Catholics.' Well we're not cafeteria constitutionalists. It's all a very important package," she said.

"Religious freedom, like the Holy Father says, is a gift of God. It's not negotiable. It is a requirement of being of God's creation, especially in this country because we all have freedom of religion, at least for now. We need to speak up for everyone."

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