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Obama to employers: Notify workers if you're dropping contraceptive coverage

Richard Wolf USA Today Religion News Service | Jul. 18, 2014
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Employers that intend to drop coverage for some or all forms of contraception in the wake of the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby decision must notify employees of the change, the Obama administration said Thursday.

The notice was posted on the Department of Labor website as a new "frequently asked question" about the Affordable Care Act, the health care law passed in 2010 and still being implemented.

The Supreme Court ruled last month that closely held corporations whose owners have religious objections to offering certain types of birth control in their health plans must be allowed to opt out of the government's contraception requirement. The case was brought by Hobby Lobby, a national chain of craft stores, and Conestoga Wood Specialties.

The timing of the notice came after the Senate failed Wednesday to pass Democratic legislation that would have reversed the high court's ruling. Faced with Republican opposition, the measure failed to get the 60 votes needed to clear a procedural hurdle.

Under the health care law, most corporations are required to provide 20 forms of birth control to female workers without cost-sharing. Churches and other religious organizations are excluded. Religious nonprofit groups are allowed to sign a form indicating their objection, triggering a process in which employees still will get the coverage -- but that accommodation is being contested in court.

In the wake of the Supreme Court's 5-4 ruling, which came on the last day of its term, more companies are likely to drop coverage of some or all contraceptives. The Labor Department notice is intended to warn employees.

"For plans that reduce or eliminate coverage of contraceptive services after having provided such coverage, expedited disclosure requirements for material reductions in covered services or benefits apply," the department said.

[Richard Wolf writes for *USA Today*.]

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