

have clean water, safe working environments, and rules to protect families' investments. Even the President has called for smarter regulations and repealing burdensome regulations that are around this Nation. We can repeal burdensome regulations that are nothing more than red tape and barriers for job creators. We can replace them with smart regulations that truly make our country better and give job creators the certainty they need to grow and thrive.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we must stop the enormous deficit spending that's going on right here in Washington, DC. This next year, Mr. Speaker, we're faced with another trillion dollar deficit. If my business, my small business back in Illinois, ran the way the government runs, I'd be out of business inside of the month. It's time we in Washington rein in this out-of-control spending. We cannot ask hardworking American families all across the country to live within their means but then turned around and allow Washington to take their hard-earned money and spend it without regard to the future consequences of our children and grandchildren.

It's time we pass a budget that puts our country on a viable economic path forward. When we do this, it will signal to the rest of the world that we are serious about our economic health; and, thus, we'll be able to empower job creators to invest here at home and create jobs right here in our local communities.

Mr. Speaker, I am optimistic about the future. I'm optimistic that we can do this, that we can come together. Spurring our economy and talking about growth isn't a Republican idea or a Democratic idea, but it is certainly an American idea. It's time that we put people before politics and progress before partisanship. It's time for us to work together today for the future of our country and get America back to work.

BIRTH CONTROL INSURANCE COVERAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Wisconsin (Ms. MOORE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. MOORE. Mr. Speaker, I'm here today to be a voice for the millions of women and men who are celebrating the recent decision by the Secretary of Health and Human Services regarding requiring all businesses and corporations to provide birth control insurance coverage, a lifesaving benefit for women, millions of women. Under this new rule, virtually all women would have access to birth control coverage without a copay through their employer health plan.

If you listen to the political pundits in this town, you will come to the conclusion that people do not support the Obama administration's decision and that people of faith are en route to the White House prepared to storm it be-

cause of this decision. But if you talk to the average American, you will realize that there is absolutely overwhelming support for the decision on the birth control benefit. This support crosses party lines as well as religious affiliation. In fact, a poll released just yesterday found that roughly 6 out of 10 Catholics support requiring employers to provide their employees with health care plans that cover contraceptives.

Let's be clear. This decision represents a respectful balance between religious persons and institutions and individual freedom. It is very important to clarify that the law contains an exemption for religious institutions. What that means is that approximately 335,000 churches or houses of worship can choose not to provide birth control coverage for their employees. So if you're the secretary at the church or if you are employed by the archdiocese, they do not have to provide birth control coverage for their employees. It was very important for Health and Human Services to carve out this exception with respect to separating church and State concerns.

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We are not requiring that Catholic churches go out and buy contraceptive coverage for all—in spite of what you have heard over TV. But this rule does require that religiously affiliated universities and hospitals—which are operating as large businesses and employ and serve a diverse array of people—would have to follow the same rules as other businesses. This is the part that keeps getting lost in the debate: the sole purpose of these institutions is not to offer people a place of refuge and worship. It is not a place for people of faith to go to gather in fellowship and worship. The purpose of these institutions is to provide health care, is to provide an education, football teams for their clients or for their students.

No one is trying to take away religious freedom but, rather, this ruling preserves personal freedom. The concept of separation of church and state protects these 335,000 places of worship. But the concept of separation of church and state does not mean that a church can use their bully pulpit to separate millions of women from critical health care benefits. Just imagine that women, on average, spend 30 years attempting to prevent pregnancy. Just think about what it means for the health of a woman, the health of her family to give birth or die trying for 30 years.

I understand that some people are worried and protective of their religious freedom in part because they're being misled by what this HHS ruling actually does; but I also worry that some people in the faith community are being exploited and used to create a diversion.

Another fact that people keep ignoring is that many religiously affiliated hospitals and universities already pro-

vide birth control to their employees through their insurance packages. I mean, it's standard at many of these workplaces. This is a nonissue for many Catholic and religiously affiliated colleges and universities already. And we're not talking about just a few workers. We're talking about millions of secretaries, janitorial staff, nurses aides, and lab techs of many different beliefs—some of no beliefs. So I would hope that we would not try to use religious bullying to deprive millions of women of critical, vital health care.

ASSAULT ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BARLETTA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, President Obama stood in this very Chamber and spoke about the need for fairness. Fairness, he said, is an American value. Yet the President and his administration are blatantly ignoring one of the most basic of American values—the freedom of religion. I'm referring to the decision by the Obama administration to force Catholic employers to provide insurance that includes coverage for sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception.

Catholic employers who fail to provide that insurance coverage could be fined \$2,000 per employee per year. And the Obama administration will force Catholics to buy insurance coverage that includes coverage for services that many of them find morally wrong. For many Catholics, this requirement violates their core beliefs about the sanctity of life of the unborn.

The health care law that is forcing Catholics to put their government ahead of their God includes a "religious conscience" exemption. It allows people with certain religious objections to opt out, and some religious groups have been allowed to opt out. But Catholics have been denied an opt-out. Instead, the Obama administration is forcing Catholics to violate their religious conscience.

This is not the United States of America that I know. Religious tolerance has been a bedrock principle of the American Government for almost 240 years. It's one of the reasons why the United States came to exist in the first place. The First Amendment states that Americans have the right to religious freedom. Religious freedom isn't just the ability to believe and worship as we see fit. It's also our right to keep other beliefs from being imposed on us. The Federal Government has respected those rights by being sensitive, by creating tolerant policies regarding our military service, our tax policies and even our airport screenings.

American Catholics are not asking for special rights. We're asking for equal rights. I am proudly pro-life, and I will stand here to defend the rights of