



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement by Jim Towey

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Ave Maria University to Fight HHS Mandate

Former White House Faith-Based Director Decries Attack on Religious Liberty

AVE MARIA, Fla. – (February 7, 2012)– The first responsibility of any president of a Catholic college or university is to protect and promote its Catholic identity and mission.

The federal government has no right to mandate that Ave Maria University make available services under our health plan that undermine our identity and threaten our religious liberty. The University subsidizes a very generous health plan that is available to all employees and does not cover contraceptive services, including sterilization, because we follow the teachings of the Catholic Church. Our non-Catholic employees and students understand fully that the University must adhere to Catholic teaching and they do not expect us to provide such services.

Unfortunately, a provision in the massive health care reform legislation will now force the University to either violate our core beliefs or discontinue health care coverage for our employees, and in the process, pay a steep fine to the federal government. This is wrong. Ave Maria University rejects this religious intolerance and will not bow down before government regulations that are manifestly unjust.

This effort by the federal government to coerce compliance by Catholic universities like ours is wrong and Ave Maria University will fight it. We will use all lawful means at our disposal to oppose this unjust mandate because our rights of conscience and religious liberty demand such action. The Board of Trustees of the University will be meeting to discuss what legal action, if any, the University should take to protect our religious liberty and Catholic mission.

Finally, as a former director of the Faith-Based Initiative under President Bush and as one who worked with as many Democrats as Republicans in advancing that effort, I am troubled by President Obama's failure to understand the threat that this mandate poses to religious liberty for peoples of all faiths. Why have faith-based offices in HHS and the other federal agencies if they are going to run roughshod over the rights of faith-based colleges and other institutions? The Faith-Based Initiative is descending to the level of farce – a stratagem that has turned incomprehensible, and a romp of mistaken identity that is no laughing matter.

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