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America Needs Birth Control More Than We Care To Admit

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On October 6, 2017, the Trump administration announced that it would be enacting new rules that would make it easier for any employer to deny birth control coverage to employees on religious grounds. The immediate backlash was swift, with many saying that such a rule would jeopardize the health and rights of millions of women who wouldn't be able to afford contraception otherwise. While federal judges in both California and Pennsylvania blocked the new rule, the mere attempt by the administration to restrict access to birth control reflects a pattern that conservatives have been following in recent years.

In 2011, Mississippi proposed an amendment to the state constitution that would designate zygotes, fertilized eggs, as legal persons and therefore outlaws many forms of birth control that work after fertilization. In 2012, Tom Price, who was Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services for seven months under the Trump administration, stated at the Conservative Political Action conference that "there's not one" woman who cannot afford to access contraception. That same year, Sandra Fluke, a Georgetown law student, was called a "slut" and a "prostitute" by conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh for her support for access to birth control.

But no facet of this conversation has been more controversial than former President Obama's contraception mandate. As part of the Affordable Care Act, the mandate requires companies to provide insurance to



“closely held” private companies, and institutions with a faith-based mission can be exempt from the mandate, but it still applies to most American companies. While two thirds of Americans support the rule, the Trump administration is doing what it can to eliminate it in the name of religious freedom.

It was only 53 years ago that the Supreme Court ruled 7-2 in *Griswold v. Connecticut* that professionals providing counselling and medical treatment to married couples regarding preventing conception would be legal in all states. Today, 62 percent of American women of reproductive age are using some form of contraception, including those that help to control painful complications associated with reproductive conditions such as endometriosis and polycystic ovarian syndrome.

So, if so many women rely on contraception, why is it such a controversial issue among conservatives?

Much of it simply stems from individual values. In the wake of the Sexual Revolution, there has been a floating idea among some that accessing contraception makes one more likely to engage in sexually deviant behavior. For others, it stems from a pro-life stance that can often see any form of pregnancy prevention, especially those that work after fertilization, as devaluing life itself.

Despite what many people like to claim about the supposed dangers of birth control, the data proves otherwise. Between 2007 and 2012, there was a 28-percent decrease in teen pregnancy risk, despite the fact that levels of teen sexual activity remained unchanged. The reason for this drop was found to be improved contraception use among teens.

Despite this data, the Department of Health and Human Services is putting its emphasis on abstinence-only education for teens, which many say was proven to be ineffective under the Bush administration.

The fact of the matter is that having access to contraception is important, and in many cases necessary, for women. It might mean controlling health conditions that can be debilitating or simply preventing unexpected pregnancy. Studies have found that access to various forms of contraception improve attainment of education and employment in young women, decrease the risk of a relationship failing due to an unplanned birth, and foster stronger parent-child relationships. At a very basic level, it gives women a certain autonomy that lets them determine when, or if, children will play a part in their lives. That autonomy removes barriers to any sort of career or relationship that they might want to have in the future.

But the unfortunate truth is that women face numerous barriers when it comes to accessing birth control. A lack of knowledge about various methods or misconceptions about the potential risks associated with contraception deters a lot of women from seeking birth control. This problem is worsened when there is a

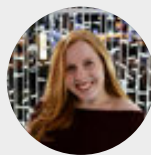
focus on abstinence-only education instead of comprehensive sex education that gives young individuals the necessary information to make safe decisions regarding their sexual lives. Restrictive legislative and legal climates play a role, as do medical practices that complicate the process of obtaining contraception, such as a doctor requiring that a woman undergo a pelvic exam or pap smear in order to get a prescription for hormonal birth control. But one of the most widely discussed barriers in modern America is simply the cost. Without insurance coverage, some of the most common methods of birth control can cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars out of pocket. For many women, the risk taken by not using contraception far outweighs the potential cost of it.

It's for this reason that the contraception mandate should be protected at all costs. It's for this reason that organizations like Planned Parenthood, which provides affordable contraception access and is prohibited by law from federal funding for abortions, need to be protected. Despite what many say about whether it's right to use it, America needs birth control. Plain and simple.

Making contraception harder to access won't make people have less sex. It's not going to lead to a great moral awakening or make anyone regret any of their past actions that may be deemed sexually deviant by some. What it will do is severely inconvenience women who don't want to worry about potentially having kids when they're not ready. There has been a decades-long fight for women to have greater autonomy over their lives, and though there is a feeling of defeat due to the actions of the current administration, there is no doubt that the fight will continue for decades to come.

Law

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