

Health coverage shouldn't depend on bosses' personal beliefs

Guest Commentary

By Kelly Culwell

The Supreme Court heard oral arguments Tuesday in a pair of cases that challenge the birth control benefit — *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* and *Conestoga Wood Specialties Corp. v. Sebelius*. In each of these cases, employers at for-profit corporations want to deny their employees legally mandated insurance coverage for birth control, based on the bosses' personal religious beliefs.

At Planned Parenthood, we see firsthand every day why these case matters so much. Planned Parenthood health care providers across the country see the benefits of affordable birth control every day. We also hear from women who are forced to choose between groceries or filling their prescription — between paying the rent or choosing the form of birth control that's right for them. Birth control is only a "social issue" if you've never had to pay for it.

Here are the facts. Ninety-nine percent of American women between the ages of 15 and 44 who are sexually active have used birth control at some point in their lives — and providing access to it is common sense and mainstream health care.

Birth control is tremendously important to women for all kinds of reasons, including to control certain medical conditions, including endometriosis and to plan our families. In fact, according to the Guttmacher Institute, nearly 60 percent of birth control pill users cite health benefits as a contributing factor for using the birth control pill.

We also know that birth control can be expensive — with some of the most effective methods costing upward of \$1,000. But when women have access to the full range of contraception methods — without cost barriers — we can actually reduce unintended pregnancy rates and the need for abortion.

We also know that access to affordable birth control is just smart for everyone. For every dollar spent on family planning, taxpayers save nearly \$6 in public money.

That's why, after decades of discriminatory coverage by insurance companies and at the recommendation of leading medical groups, the Affordable Care Act requires all insurance policies to cover the full range of FDA-approved birth control methods with no out-of-pocket cost to women — because it's part of preventive care.

Yet we still face an ongoing fight over birth control in this country. There are people — politicians, special interest groups, and now bosses — who want to take away access to affordable birth control. Based on nothing more than their personal beliefs, employers at for-profit corporations have gone all the way to the Supreme Court to try to stop their employees from getting access to this important care they need.

If the Supreme Court rules in favor of the corporations, it could jeopardize the birth control coverage that millions of women rely on. It could give bosses a free pass to discriminate and create a slippery slope in which employers, based solely on their personal religious beliefs, could deny coverage of any medical treatment or procedure to their employees that they disagree with — including mental health services, vaccines, surgery, blood transfusions and more.

That's why we've seen so many people, including doctors and medical groups speak out against these efforts and why Planned Parenthood, no matter what the court decides, will continue to stand alongside women and their families to ensure they get the health care they need — without interference from their bosses.

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Source Code: 20140328tzb