

## Biden's lack of conscience

By Benjamin Domenech - 10/19/2012

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Vice President Joe Biden, never one to allow the facts to stand in the way of a snide comment, was in typical form in his vice presidential debate with Paul Ryan. In the process, Biden showed in just a few words how little he cares about religious liberty, personal responsibility, and the cancerous growth of government.

During the debate, Biden, a Catholic, claimed religious groups' consternation over President Barack Obama's coverage mandate for contraception and abortifacients wasn't based in truth. "Let me make it absolutely clear," Biden said, "no religious institution, Catholic or otherwise, including Catholic Social Services, Georgetown Hospital, Mercy Hospital, any hospital, none has to either refer contraception, none has to pay for contraception, none has to be a vehicle to get contraception in any insurance policy they provide. That is a fact. That is a fact."

That comment is many things, but it is most certainly not a fact. And Biden knows it. He was instrumental in crafting the proposed compromise policy on the Obama administration's contraceptive mandate — the very policy that has proven unacceptable to dozens of Catholic and Protestant institutions across the country, institutions that have now brought lawsuits against the administration.

In fact, the day after Biden's comment, briefs were filed in support of the primary lawsuit against the conscience-violating mandate, brought by The Becket Fund on behalf of Wheaton College and Belmont Abbey College. The briefs came from 13 states (Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia), the Cato Institute, American Civil Rights Union, American Center for Law and Justice, Association of American Physicians and Surgeons, and a lengthy list of churches, nonprofits, colleges, and other entities. It's rare to see civil libertarians and social conservatives so united in purpose, but that's a measure of how extreme this administration has been in its assault on religious liberty.

As Ryan noted in the debate, if Biden's claim was true, why are these entities suing the administration? The answer is simple. The conscience-violating requirement has merely been shifted from the religious entities to their insurers. The money is still going to things they cannot support in good conscience.

Obama's mandate requires all institutions of a certain size to provide access to contraception, sterilization, and abortifacients without any out-of-pocket expense to students and employees covered by any health insurance plan. The "accommodation" Biden and Obama offered in response to the uproar from faithful institutions is laughably insufficient, a mere delay before compliance — as if denial of liberty is better if it begins after an election.

The mandate is incredibly unnecessary: Every American has access to contraception at every pharmacy across the country, and the costs for it are generally minuscule. Cities and localities give away millions of condoms for free — or rather, at taxpayer expense — every year. New York City's condom program alone distributes more than 3 million contraceptives a month. Yet the Obama administration decided this unnecessary step was essential, even if it meant violating basic religious liberties.