

Christian Groups Petition Hobby Lobby Over HHS Lawsuit

Christian activists are demanding Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc. drop its lawsuit opposing the Health and Human Services “preventive services” mandate.

The Rev. Lance Schmitz, pastor of the Capitol Hill Church of the Nazarene in Oklahoma City, Okla., was turned away from Hobby Lobby’s headquarters Thursday when he attempted to deliver a petition.

“I thought they’d let me drop off the package,” Schmitz said. “I thought a Christian business would be interested in hearing from a pastor with a petition signed by thousands of people of faith. I guess **Hobby Lobby** is more interested in using their faith to score political points than in finding a way to ensure that its female employees get the health care they need.”

The pastor said more than 80,000 people had signed copies of a petition circulated nationwide by the online Christian group Faithful America, and women’s rights group UltraViolet.

Hobby Lobby’s lawsuit, filed earlier this month in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma, seeks protection from **Obamacare**’s “preventive services” mandate, which forces businesses to provide the “morning-after” and “week-after” pills—without co-pay—in their health insurance plans. If Hobby Lobby failed to comply with this mandate, it would face fines up to \$1.3 million per day.

“By being required to make a choice between sacrificing our faith or paying millions of dollars in fines, we essentially must choose which poison pill to swallow,” explained David Green, founder and CEO of the arts and craft store company. “We simply cannot abandon our religious beliefs to comply with

this mandate.”

Hobby Lobby, which Green started in 1972, has 500 stores in 41 states. The company is headquartered in Oklahoma City, and employs more than 22,500 people nationwide.

Kyle Duncan, chief counsel for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty—the nonprofit, public-interest law firm representing the company—was reported by the Associated Press as saying the Green family respects the religious convictions of others, “including those who do not agree with them.”

“All they are asking is for the government to give them the same respect by not forcing them to violate their religious beliefs,” he said.

In a press statement earlier this month, Duncan said the Green family is not against contraceptives—and will continue to cover birth control for their employees—but they are against **abortion-inducing drugs**.

But Schmitz and spokespersons for the Christian groups said the morning-after and week-after pills are a form of contraceptives, and women should have a right to make their own medical decisions.

“Access to contraceptive care is a very good thing,” Schmitz said. “This isn’t about abortion. These pills do not cause abortion. It’s contraception.”

However, Duncan argues that, “The FDA’s own **birth control** guide published by the federal government says the morning-after and week-after pill may act by stopping implantation of a fertilized egg. The government itself recognizes it.”

He told the AP: “Millions of Americans would consider that an early abortion,” he said. “What the petitioners need to hear immediately is that the government cannot use health care reform as an excuse for trampling on religious rights.”

Still, the organizations in charge of the petition disagree.

"It's a woman's personal decision on what kind of birth control to use," said Cat Barr, campaign director for UltraViolet. "Hobby Lobby is out of touch with mainstream Americans. It's not their role to be dictating medical decisions."

Faithful America's spokesman, Michael Sharrard, said a large part of the group's efforts "is to try to counter extremists" and that it represents the "mainstream majority," AP reports.

The petitions accuse the Green family of using their faith as an excuse to obstruct the reform of health care and deny women access to birth control. The signatories have vowed not to stop at the craft store until it dismisses the lawsuit.