

So today I am also directing Secretary Shalala to act immediately to implement her intended suspension of the Title X family planning regulations that are also known as the “gag rule.” For almost 5 years, HHS has prohibited Title X recipients from providing their patients with full information and counseling concerning pregnancy. This dangerous restriction censors the medical information and advice that health care professionals can give their patients. As a result of today’s action, every woman will be able to receive medical advice and referrals that will not be censored or distorted by ideological arguments that should not be a part of medicine.

I’m also ordering today the Director of the Agency for International Development to repeal immediately what has become known as the Mexico City policy, that has effectively applied the “gag rule” to organizations that receive United States funding, even when those organizations use non-AID funds for those activities. Today’s actions will allow organizations that received AID funds to provide information regarding all family planning options to individuals in foreign nations. It will reverse a policy that has seriously undermined much-needed efforts to promote safe and effective family planning programs abroad and will allow us to once again provide leadership in helping to stabilize world population. Many believe that this is one of the most important environmental steps we can take.

Today I am also directing Secretary of Defense Aspin to lift immediately the near-total ban on abortions at United States military facilities and to permit them to be performed at those facilities provided that the procedure is paid for entirely with private funds. This action will allow military hospitals to perform abortions and reverse a ban that has adversely affected the lives of scores of men and women who serve our Nation around the world, or members of their families.

Finally, I am directing Secretary Shalala to instruct the Food and Drug Administration to determine whether the current import ban on the drug Mifepristone, commonly known as RU-486, is justified and to rescind the ban if there is no basis for it. Here in the United States, RU-486 has been held hostage to politics. It is time to learn the truth about what the health and safety risks of the drug really are. If the FDA removes the ban, Americans will be able to bring the drug into the country for their

personal use consistent with existing FDA policies that govern drugs not approved for distribution.

I’ve also ordered HHS to immediately explore the propriety of promoting testing in the United States as well as the possibility of licensing and manufacturing according to the standards which govern all other drugs so reviewed by our Government.

Taken as a group, today’s actions will go a long way toward protecting vital medical and health decisions from ideological and political debate. The American people deserve the best medical treatment in the world. We’re committed to providing them with nothing less.

I’d like to say in closing a special word of personal thanks to the unbelievable number of Americans from all walks of life and all different political perspectives who have children with diabetes or who, like me, have lost relatives to Alzheimer’s or have friends suffering with Parkinson’s and other diseases who came up to me over the last year and made a personal plea on the fetal tissue issue. Their statements to me and their life stories had a far greater impact on me even than the actions of the United States Congress, which included, as you know, a very broad spectrum of Republicans and Democrats on this issue.

I’d like now to sign these directives.

[At this point, the President signed the five memorandums.]

Thank you very much.

President’s Signature

Q. Mr. President, was it “William J.” or “Bill”?

The President. After a considered policy debate—[laughter]—we decided that I should sign my full name to all official documents of the Government, and I’ll continue to sign all my non—my letters “Bill Clinton.”

Withdrawal of Nomination for Attorney General

Q. Let me ask you: George was having a really hard time explaining to us what you knew about Zoe Baird’s problem, when you knew it.

Press aide. Thank you.

Q. Can you please explain—

The President. No, I want to answer this.

Q. —that to us, so that the American public would really know?

The President. I think the American people