

Trump Administration Continues Relentless Attacks on Reproductive Health and Rights

By Brian Dixon, Senior Vice President for Governmental and Political Affairs

Administration plots massive expansion of Global Gag Rule

Rumors of a planned expansion of the Global Gag Rule have been circulating for weeks. While nothing official has been released by the State Department, news reports suggest that the policy will be applied to all non-military foreign aid — it will be attached to assistance provided to multilateral agencies, foreign governments, and US-based NGOs that have previously been exempted because of First Amendment protections. In addition, the restrictions will likely be expanded to prohibit work on “gender ideology” and DEI.

The news of the planned expansion closely follows the State Department’s release of the America First Global Health Strategy, which proposes to push NGOs out of the delivery of health care. It also suggests that the administration will largely withdraw from Africa and

focus assistance instead on Latin America and Asia, despite the fact that African nations have the highest need.

These new policies will compound the harm of the administration’s previous work to eliminate aid to family planning programs — and many other global health efforts — around the world. They seem designed to press other governments to adopt American right-wing positions on these policies, and will force many agencies to choose between US foreign assistance and assistance from other countries.

Evidence from decades of the Global Gag Rule show unequivocally that this policy inflicts real harm. It causes massive shortages in contraceptives, the elimination of community health outreach, and the closure of clinics. It also results in significant increases in unsafe abortion. Its expansion, when it should instead be outright repealed, is disgraceful.

Contraceptives remain warehoused

Nearly \$10 million worth of taxpayer purchased contraceptives remain stuck in a Belgian warehouse. These were acquired by USAID for distribution in sub-Saharan Africa prior to the Trump administration’s elimination of the aid agency. The State Department is threatening to incinerate these desperately needed pills, injectables, and implants, but Belgian law prohibits the destruction of usable medications without special approval and a fee. While the commodities are still usable as of now, a recent estimate suggests that, due to nearing expiration dates, some \$3.5 million worth of these commodities will no longer be usable by mid-2026.

Multiple NGOs and foreign governments have offered to purchase the contraceptives but have been rebuffed by the State Department.

The Saving Lives and Taxpayer Dollars Act, introduced by

Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Brian Schatz (D-HI) in the Senate and Gregory Meeks (D-NY), Grace Meng (D-NY), and Lois Frankel (D-FL) in the House, would prevent the destruction of these contraceptives and other commodities purchased as part of US international assistance efforts. The legislation was offered as an amendment to the annual State Department funding bill in the House Appropriations Committee, where it was rejected. Every Democrat present voted in support, and every Republican in the room voted “no.”

In addition, 83 members of the House sent a letter to the State Department Inspector General on July 31, demanding an investigation into the destruction.

“Incinerating contraceptives that are viable, with no rush and clear demand, is the equivalent of lighting US taxpayer dollars on fire,” they wrote. They added, “This pattern of intentional incineration at the expense of the US taxpayer is financially wasteful, morally bankrupt, and an attack on the American humanitarian tradition. These actions place ideological beliefs and politics above a faithful commitment to US law, contracts, and humanitarian agreements.”

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On September 11, Senator Shaheen said, “Incinerating these life-saving supplies is inhumane, wasteful, and out of step with American values.”

White House uses shutdown to shutter domestic family planning program

The White House Budget Director is attempting to use the ongoing government shutdown to eliminate thousands of federal employees. On October 10, nearly every staff member in the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Population Affairs, which oversees the \$286.5 million Title X (ten) domestic family planning program, was laid off.

Title X was created in 1970 by President Richard Nixon to provide contraceptives and reproductive health care to lower-income Americans.

In 2023, an estimated 2.8 million Americans received Title X subsidized care. The program is an essential part of

community preventive health in this country.

The layoffs are just the latest effort to cripple Title X. Earlier this year, the administration froze \$35 million in grants, causing clinics serving patients who rely on the program to close. In conjunction with massive cuts to Medicaid and the exorbitant increase in the cost of health insurance premiums coming as a result of the budget bill passed by Congress, this move threatens to put contraceptives and other reproductive health care out of reach for millions of Americans.

In other news from the Department of Health and Human Services, the Secretary is calling for a “review” of the FDA’s approval of mifepristone, which occurred a quarter-century ago, in 2000. If this review is like the other “studies” promoted by RFK Jr, we can expect it to be deeply flawed and filled with misinformation and crackpottery. 🌐