

IN THE STATES

# Obama revamp on birth control shifts dynamic

By DONNA CASSATA  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's opposition is now the divided one.

For three weeks of heated rhetoric, Republicans cast the president's new rule that religious schools and hospitals must provide insurance for free birth control to their employees as an attack on individual liberty. The contentious issue united recently fractured Republicans, Catholic bishops and religious groups, while splitting Democrats who feared an election-year fallout.

Obama's leading Republican rivals — Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich — had sensed a political opening and were relentless in criticizing the president.

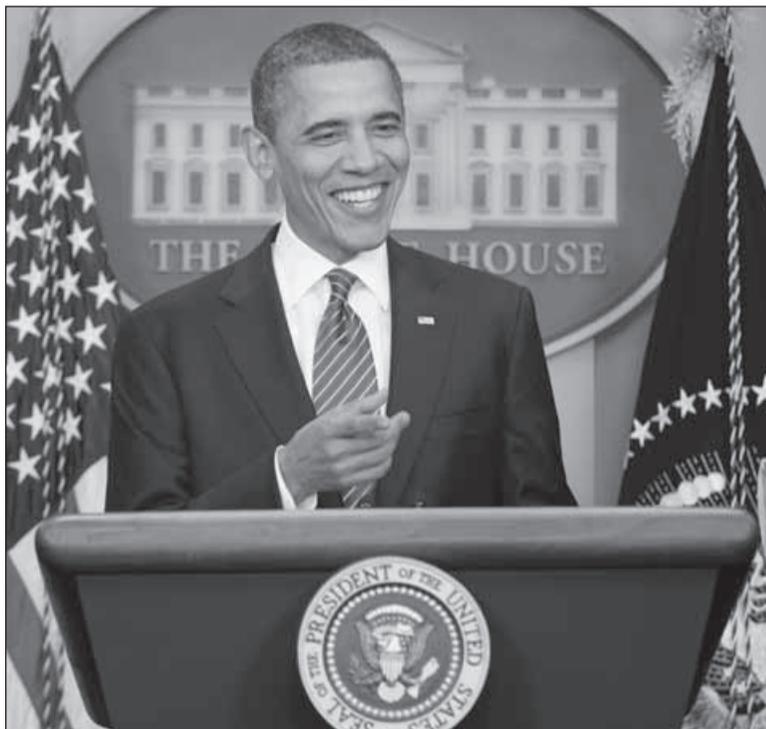
Obama caved to the pressure on Friday, announcing a compromise that allows employees at religious-affiliated institutions to get free contraception directly from health-insurance compa-

nies, rather than from employers who say it would violate their long-held convictions.

Almost immediately, Democrats who had disagreed with the White House backed the revised policy. So did Sister Carol Keehan, president and chief executive officer of the Catholic Health Association of the United States and a crucial player in both this debate and the fierce fight over Obama's health care overhaul law. The head of the nation's bishops called it a good first step, but reserved final judgment.

The once-formidable coalition against the president had splintered. Factions that had stood with the Republicans cautiously backed Obama's midcourse correction. It was a necessary policy change that reversed the political dynamic.

"After the many genuine concerns that have been raised over the last few weeks, as well as, frankly, the more cynical desire on the part of some to make this into a political football, it became clear that spending months



SUSAN WALSH/AP

President Barack Obama smiles as he arrives Friday to announce the revamp of his contraception policy.

hammering out a solution was not going to be an option, that we needed to move this faster," Obama said in announcing his retreat and compromise.

The comment was a clear acknowledgment that his administration needed to move away quickly from an all-consuming battle that pitted Obama against the Catholic Church, hardly the fight a president wants to pick when he's seeking another term.

"At the end of the day, Church one, White House zero," said Sara Taylor Fagen, a Republican strategist and White House political adviser in George W. Bush's administration.

Among those challenging the administration was Tim Kaine, former chairman of the Democratic National Committee, a Senate candidate in Virginia and a Catholic who worked with Jesuit missionaries in Honduras.

"I am pleased that the White House has taken further steps to ensure that all women have access to affordable contraception and to ensure that religious organizations will not be asked to violate their beliefs in the process," Kaine said in a statement.

Republicans, meanwhile, vowed to continue to fight, looking to push legislation in the House and possibly the Senate on religious liberty.

# Man pleads guilty in plot to kill president

By JAY REEVES  
The Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — A man from Uzbekistan who pleaded guilty Friday to plotting to kill President Barack Obama with an automatic rifle claimed he was acting in the direction of an Islamic terror group in his home country.

Authorities said Ulugbek Kodirov had discussed trying to kill the president as he campaigned for re-election because he would be out in public more often. Kodirov entered the plea during a hearing in Birmingham before U.S. District Judge Abdul K. Kallon, an Obama appointee.

Defense attorney Lance Bell said Kodirov, 22, avoided a potential life sentence by pleading guilty. He faces up to 30 years in prison, though Bell expected Kodirov to receive about half that. The judge also told Kodirov that he will face deportation once he's released from prison.

Kodirov pleaded guilty to three counts: Threatening to kill the president, possessing an automatic weapon and providing material support to terrorists. Four other charges were dropped as part of the deal.

Area Muslims who knew Kodirov were stunned to learn of his plans.

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