

# Be Not Afraid of Mitt Romney

**George Lakoff and Elisabeth Wehling** [RSN and GeorgeLakoff.com 23 September 2012]

Do you believe in freedom of religion? President Obama does, and he is defending Americans' freedom of religion against Mitt Romney and Fox News in the administration of his health care bill.

In difficult cases, he has extended freedom of religion even further, beyond people to churches and houses of worship. Insurance companies are required to cover contraception with no co-pays for the women whose health care they are covering. This guarantees freedom of religion for the women covered, and does not affect insurance companies, which are neither people nor religious institutions.

What about hospitals, charities with a religious affiliation, and religious employers who have a moral objection to contraception? Women getting health care paid through these institutions will be able to obtain contraception from the insurance companies, not the religious institutions. Thus the president has found a way to extend freedom of religion not only to all women, but even beyond people to churches and religious employers.

This makes President Obama a remarkable champion of freedom of religion in contemporary American history.

Moreover, President Obama is very much in touch with the values of Americans. A recent Gallup Poll has shown that, in the US, 82 per cent of Catholics think that birth control is "morally acceptable." 90 per cent of non-Catholics believe the same. Overall, 89 per cent of Americans agree on this. In the May 2012 poll, Gallup tested beliefs about the moral acceptability of 18 issues total, including divorce, gambling, stem cell research, the death penalty, gay relationships, and so on. Contraception had by far the greatest approval rating. Divorce, the next on the list, had only 67 per cent approval compared to 89 per cent for contraception.

Mitt Romney and Fox News, on the other hand, are proposing a huge backward step on freedom of religion. Romney has said he would support a bill that would allow employers and insurers to deny their female employees insurance coverage for birth control and other health services, based on the religious beliefs of the employers and insurers. As far as employers are concerned, this fits with President Obama's policy. But the extension to insurance companies violates the freedom of religion that the President guaranteed to women.

In addition, Romney has said he would "get rid of" Planned Parenthood, an organization that allows women freedom of religion by supplying contraception if they choose to ask for it. This would be another major blow to freedom of religion.

In short, Romney is advocating, and would take, a big backward step to deny freedom of religion to women.

Given that 89 per cent of the American people support contraception, we have no reason to be afraid of Romney - unless we let him get away with his attempt to frame the President as being against religion. The President's advance in promoting freedom of religion should be shouted from the rooftops.