

HHS mandate “absolute violation” of religious freedom

By Elizabeth Skalski

eskalski@catholicreview.org

First District U.S. Rep Andy Harris, a Republican and a Catholic, added his voice to the chorus of critics on a national health care mandate.

“This is really the greatest assault on religious liberty that I remember in my lifetime,” said Harris, a parishioner of St. Joseph, Cockeysville.

On Feb. 10 President Barack Obama announced a revision to a Jan. 20 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ mandate forcing Catholic employers to offer employees health coverage that includes contraception and abortion-inducing drugs. The revision allows religious employers not to offer such services to their employees but insurance companies must.

In a Feb. 16 conference call with reporters from Catholic newspapers, Anthony Picarello, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops general counsel, said religious organizations weren’t accommodated or consulted.

“Religious liberties are at stake - we’re not going to stop until we get it done,” Picarello said.

To protest the ruling, Mount St. Mary’s University president Thomas H. Powell called for a day of prayer and fasting Feb. 10 at the Emmitsburg school to support

religious liberties.

Cardinal Edwin F. O'Brien denounced the policy as an over-reach and issued a letter Jan. 25 to parishioners.