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NEWS FROM THE 11TH DISTRICT

FREEDOM OF RELIGION UNDER SIEGE

By: Suffolk County Legislator Thomas F. Barraga (R- West Islip)

As an elected official I am invited to attend many meetings held by groups dealing with issues of importance. Recently I attended several conferences conducted by a new Island-wide group called “Catholics for Freedom of Religion” whose purpose is to protect America’s religious Liberty as spelled out in the 1st Amendment of the United State Constitution.

There is a growing concern that religious freedom in this country is being crippled by the actions of the Obama administration through the Federal Department of Health and Human Services. In August 2011, the Department of Health and Human Services issued its rule stating that the full range of FDA-approved contraceptives are mandatory in the preventative services for women in all health plans. This rule included a narrow religious exemption; however, the vast majority of faith-based organizations do not meet the criteria for this exemption. Catholic hospitals, schools, Universities, and charitable organizations, for example, do not qualify. Neither do individual business owners qualify for the exemption. Opposition was swift and united. On February 10, 2012 the Department of Health and Human Services allowed for an “accommodation,” requiring that religious employers’ health insurance companies cover the costs of contraceptives and abortifacients rather than the employers. On February 28, 2012 Jeanne Monahan M.T.S., Director of the Center for Human Dignity, Family Research Council stated in her testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives “Religious employers will still be forced to pay insurers who would in turn provide their employees the services to which they have religious objections. This is no accommodation.”

Over the past year Hobby Lobby, a for-profit Corporation based on Christian principles and beliefs located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma has challenged the federal health care law requiring that a company provide health care coverage that must include the availability of the morning after pill and the week after pill along with other abortive drugs. At this time, U.S. District Court Judge Joe Heaton granted a temporary exemption to Hobby Lobby while the case is being determined.

The Federal Governments abridgment of the people’s First Amendment Rights is unacceptable and I support Catholics for Freedom of Religion efforts to defend the sanctity of

the First Amendment. As Abraham Lincoln said, “Don’t interfere with anything in the Constitution. That must be maintained, for it is the only safeguard of our liberties.”