The Obama Administration is facing a backlash from Catholic leaders over a provision of a health care law that would require Catholic hospitals, charities and other institutions to include birth control in their health insurance plans. The issue could play a role with voters in the 2012 presidential election.

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Birth Control Mandate Angers Catholic Leaders

ANN CURRY, co-host:

Meantime, the Obama administration is facing a backlash from Catholic leaders over a provision in the new health care law. At issue is birth control and NBC's Andrea Mitchell is joining us this morning with the story. Hey, Andrea, good morning.

ANDREA MITCHELL, reporting:

Good morning to you, Ann. Well, it is an issue that raises questions of church and state, First Amendment freedoms, and government mandates. Add to that partisan politics and you have a volatile mix that could spell trouble for the White House in the campaign. All across the country the voices on both sides are getting louder. From the pulpit and on the Internet outraged Catholic clergy have been preaching against the White House decision requiring Catholic hospitals, charities, and other institutions to include birth control in their health insurance plans.

Archbishop TIMOTHY DOLAN: Never before has the federal government forced individuals and organizations to go out into the marketplace and buy a product that violates their conscience.

MITCHELL: The administration says religiously owned providers should not be allowed to impose their faith on non-Catholic employees. The rule does not apply to churches themselves and supporters say the Constitution mandates a separation of church and state.

Unidentified Woman: People are not being forced to adopt a new set of religious beliefs by this rule. They can practice their religion as they see fit, they can choose not to use birth control.

MITCHELL: Twenty-eight states already require contraceptive services to be included in health benefits.

JAY CARNEY (White House Press Secretary): We are going to work with institutions that have concerns here. But I think it's important to note that we believe that American women deserve to have access to that...
kind of insurance coverage regardless of where they work.
MITCHELL: But in this volatile campaign Republican candidates are calling it a war on religion.
Former Representative NEWT GINGRICH: This is a decision so totally outrageous and an illustration of
such radical secular ideology that I believe the entire hierarchy will oppose it every inch of the way.
MITCHELL: The Romney campaign is trying to organize opponents to sign an online petition against the
new rule.
Former Governor MITT ROMNEY: We must have a president who is willing to protect America's first
right, our right to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience.
MITCHELL: While the candidates focus on politics, other Republicans say it is a fundamental moral
question.
Unidentified Man: The decision itself is incomprehensible and I think the president is going to need to
step--to back off of this issue or the courts are going to do it for him.
MITCHELL: The new policy has even touched a nerve with some liberal Democrats like Mark Shields on
PBS.
MARK SHIELDS: The fallout is cataclysmic for the White House and for the president. And he's left
them out to dry. I mean, he really has with—and just a policy that I think is quite frankly indefensible.
MITCHELL: While surveys indicate that most Catholics believe they can be good members of the church
without following the church's teaching on birth control, the issue could still persuade independent voters
in swing states like Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, states that the president needs to win. Ann
CURRY: That's a story to be continued. Thank you so much, Andrea Mitchell this morning.
MITCHELL: Thank you.