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White House to pull support for conference

By Charles Hurt
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Bush administration is scrapping plans to sponsor a major global health and reproductive rights conference that features liberal advocacy groups, including several pro-choice organizations and MoveOn.org, which is spending millions of dollars on negative ads to defeat President Bush.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) will withdraw its support today, according to a senior government official.

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"We expect they will be notified officially" today, a senior government official said of USAID's decision to withdraw from the June gathering in Washington.



President George W. Bush Daniel Rosenbaum (THE WASHINGTON TIMES) Click [here](#) for larger image

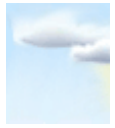
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The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which said it never formally agreed to help fund "Youth and Health: Generation on the Edge," denounced the conference organizers late Friday for including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) — both divisions of HHS — in a recent promotional brochure.

The Global Health Council, which is organizing the four-day conference, included USAID, the CDC and HRSA as "platinum" or top-level financial sponsors in the brochure that the council distributed last week.

News of the funding angered many on Capitol Hill, especially conservatives who don't think the government should help promote pro-choice groups such as the International Planned Parenthood Organization and the U.N. International Family Planning Fund.

Both groups, along with the fiercely anti-Bush MoveOn.org, will participate in the conference.

"The conference has increasingly moved from a teaching forum to a platform for expressing partisan political views, and that's evidenced by the inclusion of the political organization MoveOn.org," a senior government official said.

Among the speakers at the event — set for June 1 to 4 at the Omni Shoreham Hotel — are Doortje Braeken of Planned Parenthood and Thorya Ahmed Obaid of the U.N. Population Fund.

Both organizations are strongly critical of the Bush administration's pro-life stance, and both have been denied U.S. government funding for their family-planning efforts, which include support for abortion.

Just yesterday, for example, Planned Parenthood, along with other liberal groups such as the National Organization for Women, co-sponsored the March for Women's Lives around the White House and on the National Mall.

Also of concern is that one day of the event, titled "Advocacy

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Day," is devoted to participants in the conference going to Capitol Hill to lobby Senate and congressional offices.

"A large portion of this conference is devoted to lobbying, and government appropriations are not allowed to be used for lobbyist activities," the government official said on the condition of anonymity.

HHS spokesman Bill Pierce said, "After careful review, we determined that we were not going to fund this conference due to concerns we had about federal funds being used for lobby purposes."

But that decision was made before outraged conservatives began calling USAID and HHS offices last week demanding to know why they were funding the conference, Mr. Pierce said.

"We also have concerns that they used our name and logo in their brochures without our approval or authorization because we had not officially committed funds," he said.

It was not clear how much government money had been committed to the conference or how much the Global Health Council had expected to get from the government. Nor is the total budget for the conference clear.

For USAID's part, it had pledged about \$190,000, according to the government source, which was significantly pared back from earlier years. From 2000 to last year, USAID support for the annual conference had fallen by more than 20 percent.

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