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Trump s Team of Bibles set to launch conservative Christian agenda; Funding of abortion services, transgender protections and requirements to fund contraception could all be targeted by Trump s proposed cabinet

BYLINE: JOHN IBBITSON

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ABSTRACT

Funding of abortion services, transgender protections and requirements to fund contraception could all be targeted by Trump s proposed cabinet

FULL TEXT

Donald Trump has recruited an army of Christian soldiers for his proposed cabinet, a Team of Bibles who stand ready to implement the most socially conservative agenda of any administration since the days of Ronald Reagan.

Defunding abortion services - perhaps even reversing Roe v. Wade, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized such services nationwide. Funding private religious schools with public tax dollars. Removing transgender protections and requirements to fund contraception. All are on the agenda of the president-elect's team, which can count on the support of a Republican-controlled Congress.

"Some of the most conservative legislation and executive actions that we've been wanting will go through," predicts Walker Wildmon, a spokesman for the American Family Association, which advocates for conservative Christian values. "What was once unrealistic may be a reality now."

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At the head of the brigade is vice-president-elect Mike Pence, who describes himself as "a Christian, a conservative and a Republican, in that order."

As a Republican congressman, he once argued that evolution should be taught as theory and not fact. As governor of Indiana, he supported legislation, put in limbo by the courts, that required an aborted fetus to be

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cremated or buried, and supported legislation that could have allowed businesses to discriminate against sexual minorities, before partly backing down in the face of public protest.

As a much more experienced politician than the president-elect, Mr. Pence could become one of America's most powerful vice-presidents.

Scott Pruitt, a long-time critic of the Environmental Protection Agency, will now head it. The Oklahoma state Attorney-General opposes marriage equality, abortion rights and transgender rights, as well as what he considers excessive environmental regulations. As a conservative Christian, he accepts the biblical teaching that God gave man dominion over the creatures of the earth (Genesis 1:26), which presumably includes permitting virtually unrestricted exploration for, and exploitation of, oil and natural gas.

Rick Perry is Mr. Trump's pick for energy secretary. The former governor of Texas has described political office as "a pulpit" and once said: "God has put me in this place at this time to do His will." He has also, in the past, declared that the United States is in so much trouble through overspending and over-regulation that "I think it's time for us to just hand it over to God and say, 'God, You're going to have to fix this.' "

Billionaire philanthropist Betsy DeVos is a devout Christian who, along with the president-elect, supports school vouchers, in which parents can direct their children's public-education grants to whichever school they wish, including private religious schools. As education secretary, Ms. DeVos will be charged with introducing such a program.

Other devout conservative Christians nominated for cabinet, all of whom oppose abortion rights and the rights of sexual minorities, include housing and urban development secretary Ben Carson, health secretary Tom Price and UN ambassador Nikki Haley.

These appointments hearten Collin Hansen, editorial director at the Gospel Coalition, which represents a number of evangelical churches in the United States and overseas. "But his Supreme Court choice is everything," Mr. Hansen adds. If Mr. Trump appoints a truly conservative judge to fill the current vacancy, and if he gets an opportunity in this term to appoint a second one, then the Supreme Court might overturn *Roe v. Wade*, and abortion law would become a matter for each state to decide.

Not everyone in the proposed cabinet embraces social conservatism. Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson, Mr. Trump's nominee for secretary of state, successfully advocated for the Boy Scouts to admit openly gay troop leaders.

Mr. Tillerson, who once served as Scouts national president, "may be the greatest ally liberals have in the cabinet for their abortion and LGBT agendas," warns Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, which advocates for socially conservative issues.

And then there is the president-elect himself. Mr. Trump is thrice-married, and his relations with the social-conservative leadership were strained during the campaign, especially when a tape emerged in which he boasted of sexually harassing women.

Nonetheless, 80 per cent of evangelical voters supported the Republican nominee, according to exit polls, and he clearly intends to respect their agenda. On health, expect to see Planned Parenthood, which provides abortion services, defunded, along with other restrictions on abortion access and funding. Health providers and insurers that receive public funds will no longer be compelled to provide or fund contraceptives if they object on religious grounds.

Progressives, including progressive Christians, are appalled by the prospect. Those who will suffer most from any new limits on abortion "will be young women, immigrant women, women of colour, who are already struggling to keep themselves, their health and their families together," says Katey Zeh, who chairs the board of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

On education, expect federal funding for school vouchers and an end to any federal demands over how states and local boards run their schools, making it easier to get creationism on the curriculum and sex-ed off it.

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As for sexual minorities, Mr. Trump is likely to revoke executive orders issued by President Barack Obama protecting transgender Americans using washrooms in schools and other government-funded buildings.

The Supreme Court struck down any prohibition on gay marriage, but Washington could support states that protect the rights of people who refuse to provide services to homosexuals because of religious beliefs. A president Trump could, in theory, even seek to reinstate a ban on sexual minorities serving in the military.

For Ms. Zeh, the question is how to respond: "There are so many communities who are terrified of what's going to happen, the strategy has to be: How do we build bridges among the different communities?" But it's a question to which no one at the moment seems to have an answer.

Not everything on conservative Christian agenda may be accomplished, Mr. Wildmon acknowledged.

"We are confident that we will get some of the most conservative things done in decades," he said. "But we are realistic that Trump's going to make mistakes, going to do things that we disagree with. We're just going to have to face that when we get there."

But if Mr. Trump's cabinet choices are any indication, conservative Christians will have more to celebrate than mourn in the years ahead.

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