What, exactly, is it, and why is it so harmful to girls and women worldwide?

It certainly didn’t take long. On January 23, just three days after his inauguration, President Donald Trump imposed an expanded Global Gag Rule, making clear that women around the world will be among the first casualties of the Trump-Pence administration. Trump’s Global Gag Rule denies foreign organizations receiving U.S. global assistance the right to use their own non-U.S. funds to provide information, referrals or services for legal abortion or to advocate for the legalization of abortion in their countries.

While this may seem like just another anti-choice maneuver, it’s actually much more egregious. Trump’s Global Gag Rule applies not only to family planning programs, but to every program falling under the category of “global health assistance.” It therefore targets the most effective health organizations in 60 low and middle-income countries which, without funding, will not be able to provide crucial health services. Among them are HIV prevention and treatment, maternal health care, provision of contraception and counsel for women on the potential risks of Zika infection.

“Reproductive health, especially access to contraception, is the key to improving a woman’s life and determining her future,” says Suzanne Ehlers, PAI’s president and CEO. “Right now, there are 225 million women in developing countries who want to prevent pregnancy but are not using modern contraception. This policy will put birth control even further from their reach.”

History is proof. Starting in 2002, after President George W. Bush imposed a less expansive gag rule, PAI researched that policy’s impact abroad, finding that scores of family planning clinics had been closed and NGO staffs drastically reduced. In Ghana alone, there was a 40 percent drop in the use of contraception due to service cuts, and 16 developing countries were no longer receiving U.S.-funded contraceptives, the primary means to preventing unwanted pregnancies.

Even before Trump’s Global Gag Rule went into effect, global health assistance provided by the United States was facing five years of stagnation. This has been exacerbated by a growing contraceptive supplies crisis due to worldwide funding cuts. Trump’s Global Gag Rule will magnify these challenges and reverse decades of progress on family planning by increasing unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions as well as maternal deaths.

The good news is PAI has already begun to battle Trump’s Global Gag Rule on many fronts, as you’ll see on page 2. To learn how you can join the fight, please turn to page 3.

“To be clear, this policy is an attack on women’s bodily autonomy and freedom, and we will see an increase in unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions as a result.” — Suzanne Ehlers, President & CEO of PAI

Source: Guttmacher Institute
Let’s Get Started

For 52 years, it’s been PAI’s core belief that universal access to comprehensive family planning and reproductive health services is a woman’s best means to mapping out a promising future. Today, with 100-plus partners in five global regions, we’re better equipped than ever to make that happen.

But we’re also at a crossroads. The Trump-Pence administration has proven itself to be anti-women—in fact, taking away the reproductive rights and health care of women worldwide is one of the few things this administration actually “succeeded” at during its first 100 days. With President Trump’s reinstatement and expansion of the Global Gag Rule, which denies foreign organizations receiving U.S. global assistance the right to use their own non-U.S. funds for abortion-related activities, it was made clear that his administration’s goal is to stifle women’s autonomy by attacking women’s health.

With that in mind, I welcome you to the inaugural issue of The Catalyst, a newsletter designed to help you, PAI’s donors and supporters, proactively stand up and fight for women and girls everywhere. On a quarterly basis, we’ll dive into a different reproductive rights issue and provide you with reports from our work around the world, personal stories and ways for you to make your voice heard. It’s also available online, where embedded links enable you to dig deeper into issues by tapping into pai.org’s vast archive.

Our first issue is focused on Trump’s Global Gag Rule. We cover the rule itself (page 1), PAI’s plans to fight it (page 2) and how you can join the battle (page 3). I hope you will consider The Catalyst the start of an ongoing conversation, and feel free to send your questions and comments to me at ceo@pai.org.

I look forward to our discussion.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Ehlers, President & CEO
THE TURNING POINT

Over the past decade, Zambia has made great strides toward increasing access to reproductive health care. But the Trump Global Gag Rule threatens to reverse these gains.

One would be hard-pressed to find a better example of just how harmful Trump’s Global Gag Rule promises to be than in the southern African country of Zambia.

A third of Zambian women will give birth by the time they are 18 years old. Most will not return to complete their education. This is a crisis for a country where more than 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and, on average, each woman gives birth to more than five children.

Over the past decade, however, Zambia has been proactive in addressing these challenges—by, among other things, increasing its reproductive health services, including access to contraception and maternal care. “In 2008,” says Amos Mwale, executive director of the Centre for Reproductive Health and Education (CRHE) in Zambia, “we were at 539 maternal deaths per 100,000 births each year. Today, we are just under 300 deaths.” That coincides with a 98 percent increase, since 2001, in those who have access to contraception.

Trump’s Global Gag Rule will stifle this progress. In Zambia, a plethora of reproductive health services are provided by NGOs, including foreign and local NGOs that because of Trump’s Global Gag Rule will no longer be eligible for U.S. global health funding if they use any non-U.S. funds for abortion-related services or advocacy. Trump’s Global Gag Rule penalizes countries like Zambia which have taken great strides to help women and girls better their futures.

“One of the U.S. is a major source of contraceptive supplies throughout sub-Saharan Africa,” Mwale explains. “If that supply is cut off, you have more pregnancies, more unsafe abortions and an increase in STIs [sexually transmitted infections], including HIV/AIDS.”

Through Mwale’s leadership, CRHE played a crucial role in Zambia’s adopting more than a dozen policies and legal frameworks specifically designed to improve the reproductive health care for young people and decrease teenage pregnancy. And it had PAI’s support along the way. “With PAI,” Mwale explains, “we do advocacy together, to ensure that services are in line with the needs of the people.”

His concerns about Trump’s Global Gag Rule are well-founded. In 2006, five years after the Bush administration established its own Gag Rule, PAI reported in its study Access Denied, that health clinics in Zambia had lost 40 percent of their staff. In addition, a U.S.-supported health program providing treatments for HIV/AIDS and malaria had been forced to shut down—all while demand for health services in the country was skyrocketing.

“This is why, he says, PAI needs donor support more than ever. “PAI is making sure CRHE and other organizations like ours can survive during times like these,” he adds. “Their support is critical. Each and every dollar is needed. Otherwise, we will see a denial of access for all reproductive health services.”

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WHAT CAN YOU DO?

SIGN OUR PETITION
Join more than 20,000 people and sign PAI’s petition to let President Trump know that his Global Gag Rule robs women and girls around the world of their right to access comprehensive family planning services and, thus, determine their own futures. You can even add a personal message to the petition, which you’ll find at www.pai.org/GGRpetition.

CALL YOUR REPRESENTATIVE
The Global Health, Empowerment and Rights (HER) Act, up for consideration in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, would repeal the Global Gag Rule permanently. We urge you to call your representatives, whom you’ll find along with a script, if needed, at www.pai.org/callyourrep.

BE A PAI SOCIAL MEDIA CHAMPION
Sign up at www.pai.org/share, and we’ll provide you with social media-friendly messages about PAI and its work for use on any, or all, of your platforms. This enables you to be a PAI ambassador by sharing information with your networks that promotes family planning and protests the Global Gag Rule.
In the early 1970s, as a medical student in India, Dr. Pouru Bhiwandi assisted in what normally would have been a standard procedure—a hysterectomy. But the patient that day was a 15-year-old girl who, after being raped by a family member, suffered through a botched abortion. “In the operating room,” Dr. Bhiwandi recalls, “people said the girl would be better off dead than to lose her uterus. And back then, it was true—if she couldn’t get pregnant, nobody would marry her. She had no future.”

Dr. Bhiwandi, a North Carolina-based OB-GYN physician and university professor, has worked with NGOs worldwide to provide girls and women with reproductive health care options that help ensure promising futures. She’s also a PAI board member and donor who, during a recent interview, spoke passionately about the need to support PAI’s mission.

**How did you first become interested in PAI’s work?**
When I was a medical student, there were these beautiful charts on the walls and monographs in the library—all from PAI's research. And later, when I was working at [the NGO] FHI, or Family Health International, for political reasons, we could not use U.S. funds to support family planning programs in India. So PAI stepped in with financial support until we could find alternate funding.

“I could cite many other examples, but PAI has positively affected my professional life. And now, it is the most gratifying experience and privilege to serve on its board.”

**Why is PAI’s work necessary?**
PAI’s ultimate goal is to advance reproductive health care for every woman everywhere, under the banners of advocacy and research. What impresses me most is that PAI is bold and pioneering. It has done, and continues to do, things long before they are fashionable.

Today for example, everybody talks about “climate change,” but decades ago, PAI was in the forefront, talking about climate change and biodiversity.

Even now, when most agencies are focused simply on access to reproductive health care, PAI is saying access alone is not enough. Take contraception— you need a “cafeteria” approach because what’s good for one person may not be good for another. One may say, “I would like to get by for another six or eight months,” in which case she can use condoms or pills. But if another says, “I don’t want children” or “I’ve met my desired family size,” then voluntary sterilization or a long-acting IUD are options.

**What are your thoughts on the Global Gag Rule, including the latest version?**
Under the [George W.] Bush administration, the Gag Rule affected only reproductive health services. The Trump version, as it stands right now, affects all global health services. That would include HIV/AIDS, tropical diseases, malaria. It’s far more draconian.

And we know the consequences. During the Bush years, PAI, in collaboration with other agencies, did research for Access Denied, which documented the Gag Rule’s harmful effects. Many foreign NGOs had to shut down family planning programs and clinics. Millions of women were denied services. And there were more unsafe abortions and increased maternal mortality.

**What would you say to someone considering donating to PAI?**
At this time, a gift to PAI is more important than ever. PAI will ensure that we do not lose the hard-fought gains we’ve had in reproductive rights. PAI also has a strong, dedicated staff and a charismatic, passionate leader in its CEO, Suzanne Ehlers. And your gift to PAI is magnified several-fold, as PAI helps enable organizations abroad to provide women with the health services they need to live productive, fulfilling lives.