

# **“Everybody’s not doin’ it” in New York State**

In May, 1994, Margaret Hamburg, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Health, wrote to the Catholic League asking that the League reconsider its anti-condom subway advertising campaign. “While it may be true, as the Catholic League suggests,” she wrote, “that abstinence is the most effective strategy for preventing the transmission of HIV infection, I am deeply concerned about the misleading nature of the League’s planned anti-condom subway advertising campaign.” Misleading? Promoting restraint over the inconsistent and unreliable use of condoms? Dr. Donohue responded by saying the only thing the League would reconsider would be the expansion of the campaign.

As disappointed as Ms. Hamburg was with the League’s campaign, imagine her reaction when she learned that the New York State Department of Health would be expanding on the message of restraint and abstinence. In March, the Department began a month-long public service campaign on the city’s subways which stressed that “not doin’ it is 100% protection.” The poster included a color photo of a man’s hand on the back pocket of a woman’s jeans along with the following text: “Everybody’s not doin’ it. Sex is risky. It can lead to unwanted pregnancy, AIDS or other STD’s. Condoms help...but not doin’ it is 100% protection.”

Could it be that with the League having successfully “tested the waters” with its anti-condom ads, the New York State Department of Health felt safe to go public with the same idea-that restraint is the best option physically *and* emotionally, not to mention spiritually?