

# NOMINEE TO HEAD FDA DEEPLY FLAWED

When news broke that President Barack Obama would nominate Margaret A. Hamburg as the director of the Food and Drug Administration, our alarm bells instantly rang.

In 1994, Bill Donohue received a letter from Dr. Hamburg, at that time the New York City Health Commissioner, complaining about ads that the Catholic League had placed in the New York City subways. The ads read, "Want to Know a Dirty Little Secret? Condoms Don't Save Lives. But Restraint Does. Only Fools Think Condoms Are Foolproof. Remember, Better Safe Than Sorry."

Hamburg admitted that abstinence was the best way to stop HIV infection, but she nonetheless labeled the ads "misleading." Why? Because, she said, "Condoms, if used correctly and consistently from the start to the finish" are effective. In response, Donohue said it was "blatantly irresponsible—both medically and morally—to endorse subway ads by the Gay Men's Health Crisis that were racist, vulgar and dangerous."

Hamburg's interest in abstinence, it turns out, was a ruse. Two years earlier, she opposed a sex education curriculum in New York City that stressed abstinence over safe sex presentation in the classroom. Worse, her efforts to fight AIDS show how irresponsible she is.

In the early 90s, so-called sex clubs—the very places where HIV was being transmitted—were still open, even though gays were dying left and right. And what did Health Commissioner Hamburg say? Keep them open. By that time, gays were having sex in bookstores—legally. "The clubs range from bathhouses and bars to movie houses and bookstores where patrons pay an entrance fee to have sex in open areas and closed rooms," said

the *New York Times*. Hamburg compromised: no fellatio or anal intercourse was allowed but masturbation was okay. When HIV rates continued to increase, she asked the question, "Is it still a lack of education? Is it burnout and a sense of hopelessness? Is it denial? Is it recklessness? We don't fully understand." After all of the funerals, she was the one in denial.

In other words, Hamburg's judgment is deeply flawed.