

# REQUEST FOR CONSCIENCE CLAUSE IN SENATE BILL

On September 10, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions held a hearing on S. 104, "Equity in Prescription Insurance and Contraceptive Coverage Act of 2001." The bill, introduced by Senator Olympia Snowe, would require private health insurance plans that cover drugs to cover prescription contraceptives. The legislation does not provide for a conscience clause that would allow an exemption for religious organizations.

Catholic League president William Donohue explained the league's reaction to the bill today:

"I am writing to every member of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions asking that a conscience clause be inserted into the 'Equity in Prescription Insurance and Contraceptive Coverage Act of 2001.' This country has a long and honorable tradition of allowing religious organizations to exempt themselves from bills that violate doctrinal teachings. It should be so honored again. The net result of not granting an exemption would be to deny prescription drug coverage to employees of Catholic organizations.

"There are two other related objections. First, if no conscience clause is granted it would surely constitute an egregious violation of the principle of separation of church and state. Second, the absence of a conscience clause in this bill would set the stage for what the bill's backers really want—a mandate that private health care carriers pay for abortion. This is not guesswork: in the bill's 'Findings' section, one of the entries listed complains that women spend much more than men on out-of-pocket health care costs, 'with contraceptives and reproductive health care services accounting for much of the difference.' The term,

'reproductive health care,' of course, is code for abortion.

"We will protest this bill at every stage in the legislative process until a conscience clause is included."