

SURGEON GENERAL PICK ALREADY IN HOT SEAT

Soon after she was nominated Surgeon General, we noted that Dr. Regina Benjamin was already in the hot seat.

We commended President Obama and congratulated Dr. Benjamin, a Catholic, as an excellent choice for Surgeon General. Indeed, she has been recognized by Pope Benedict XVI for distinguished service. But there are things that will test her mettle right away.

To begin with, at the same news conference that the president used to announce this nomination, he pushed hard for a new health reform bill. Our main concern is whether abortion services will be mandated as part of the plan.

In June, 19 Democrats, 11 of whom are Catholic, sent a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi saying they will not vote for health care reform “unless it explicitly excludes abortion funding” from the plan. The National Right to Life Committee said the bills being considered “contain multiple provisions that would result in federally mandated insurance coverage of abortion on demand, massive federal subsidies for abortion, mandated creation of many new abortion clinics, and nullification of at least some state limitations on abortion.”

So where does Dr. Benjamin come in on all of this? In June the House Committees on Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, and Education and Labor announced that a new Advisory Committee will decide which services will be covered; the Surgeon General is in charge of that committee.

Dr. Benjamin needs to let the public know where she stands. As a practicing Catholic, she cannot chair a committee that would support mandated abortion coverage in employer insurance plans. There is no “common ground” on this issue.