

SURGEON GENERAL PICK ALREADY IN HOT SEAT

Catholic League president Bill Donohue explains why the newly nominated Surgeon General, Dr. Regina Benjamin, is in the hot seat:

Yesterday, I commended President Obama and congratulated Dr. Benjamin: she is an excellent choice for Surgeon General. But some things are developing very quickly that will test her mettle right away.

To begin with, at the same news conference that the president used to announce his choice of Dr. Benjamin, he pushed hard for a new health reform bill. Indeed, he let the Senate Finance Committee know that he wants a bill by week's end. A central issue is whether abortion services will be mandated as part of the plan.

On June 25, 19 Democrats, 11 of whom are Catholic, sent a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi saying they will not vote for healthcare reform "unless it explicitly excludes abortion funding" from the plan. According to Douglas Johnson of the National Right to Life Committee, 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? On June 19, 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. And who is in charge of the Health Benefits Advisory Committee? The Surgeon General.

Dr. Benjamin should not wait until the Senate considers her appointment 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.

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