

# ALBANY HEALTH BILL FRAUGHT WITH PROBLEMS

The New York State Senate approved a bill on February 5 requiring all health insurers to cover contraceptives. It made an exception for those religious institutions where most of the people who work there and most of the people it serves share that religion. This was considered a compromise measure to appease the objections of New York Bishops. But it did not succeed: Edward Cardinal Egan criticized the bill for trampling on the first amendment rights of Catholics.

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to this issue today:

“It is not easy to understand how it can reasonably be said that the Senate has worked out a compromise with Catholics. Either the lawmakers believe in conscience clauses or they don't. It will not do to say that Catholic organizations can practice their doctrinal prerogatives save when most of the people who work there or are served by them are non-Catholic. As everyone knows, Catholic schools in the inner city provide a quality education to a largely African American population. Should school administrators lose their religious rights because too many of these kids are Protestant? This would never pass constitutional muster.

“Apparently, the lawmakers have not considered the implications of their decision. For example, it is well known that some Catholic colleges employ a mostly non-Catholic faculty. One way around this bill would be to institute a quota system that gives preferential treatment to Catholic applicants, thus ensuring a Catholic majority. And have the lawmakers considered this: Catholic institutions could opt out of providing prescription coverage altogether and instead offer a cash grant to employees to pay for prescriptions of

their choice.

“It is not too late for lawmakers to rethink this bill. Failing that, Governor Pataki should veto it. If he doesn't, it will set the stage for forced coverage of abortions—the goal of NARAL, this bill's prime backer. This, in turn, may lead to the elimination of all health care coverage by Catholic institutions. Then cash grants will be extended even further. Is this the legacy our officials want to be tagged with?”

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## **APPEAL TO MICHAEL EISNER AND HARVEY WEINSTEIN: RESCHEDULE “40 DAYS AND 40 NIGHTS”**

Catholic League president William Donohue has asked Disney chairman Michael Eisner and Miramax co-chairman Harvey Weinstein to reschedule the opening of “40 Days and 40 Nights” (the movie is a Miramax production and Disney is the parent company of Miramax). The film portrays actor Josh Hartnett as a Catholic who pledges to give up sex for Lent but has his will tested by his ex-girlfriend. It is scheduled to open March 1. Lent begins February 13 and runs through Easter, March 31. Donohue is requesting that the movie open sometime after Easter. He explained his reasoning as follows:

“In my letter to Michael Eisner and Harvey Weinstein, I asked each of them to ‘intercede on behalf of Catholics’ by doing whatever they could to reschedule the movie. ‘To show a film that parodies Lent in a most vulgar way is bad enough,’ I said, ‘but to show it during Lent is outrageous.’ It is no wonder the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* commented, ‘Pretty

sensitive of Miramax to schedule a film mocking Lent during Lent, eh?' Indeed, the movie is rated R for 'strong sexual content, nudity and language' and is noted for its 'vulgar sex gags.' Now if this is Weinstein's Lenten gift to Catholics, he can keep it.

"On the Miramax website, it says the movie is based on the real-life experience of the film's writer, Rob Perez. Yet the movie's publicist tells us that Lent was used merely as a vehicle for the character to give up sex—so as to 'make the story cute.' But wouldn't it have been just as cute to portray the character as a Muslim who gives up sex from sundown to sunset during Ramadan and is tempted during the day? That, however, would have cast Weinstein as being insensitive to Muslims and that is not a sin he wants to commit. Indeed, Weinstein postponed the film 'Gangs of New York' after 9-11 saying, 'in light of the ever-changing current events, we have chosen to err on the side of sensitivity and postpone the wide release of the film until 2002.' Wonderful. Now if only he treats Catholics the way he does Muslims and New York thugs, Catholics will be delighted."

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## **CATHOLICS HAVE TO WONDER: WHAT MAKES ELIOT SPITZER TICK?**

New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer has issued seven subpoenas to crisis pregnancy centers in New York State; the February 1 deadline has been extended to February 15. The centers must provide documentation that will enable the attorney general's office to determine whether there is

evidence of practicing medicine without a license or whether the centers have practiced deceptive advertising.

Catholic League president William Donohue commented as follows:

“On January 22, 1999, I issued a news release questioning whether Eliot Spitzer was pro-Catholic or anti-Catholic. The question was raised because when Spitzer was a candidate for the post of attorney general, he protested a decision by Independent Health that would have excluded Catholic hospitals from its coverage. Spitzer blasted the decision as ‘heinous’ and did so by holding a press conference in front of Mercy Hospital in Buffalo. Thus did he show his support for Catholic hospitals to decide their own health policies, including their right not to participate in abortions. Yet no sooner had he been elected when he announced his opposition to hospital mergers of Catholic and secular facilities that honor Catholic prerogatives. He recently lost a round on this issue.

“Catholics have also come to know Eliot Spitzer for his impassioned defense of laws that seek to repress the free speech rights of anti-abortion protesters. For example, he has sought to stop protesters from ‘demonstrating, standing, sitting, lying down or posting or carrying signs’ on certain city blocks near abortion clinics and has even sought to ban ‘excessive noise.’ Now Spitzer has targeted crisis pregnancy centers.

“Since he’s been in office, Spitzer has defended the religious rights of Jews and Rastafarians. Now his dealings with Catholics are on the line. We will soon know what makes him tick. If he treats crisis pregnancy centers the way he treats abortion clinics, Catholics will be grateful.”