

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **CONTACT:** Alex Glass (Murray) 202.224.2834
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SENATORS DECRY IDEOLOGICAL APPOINTMENT TO HEALTH POST

VOCAL CRITIC OF CONTRACEPTION TO OVERSEE POPULATION CONTROL FUNDING

Washington, D.C. – Fourteen U.S. Senators today sent a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt urging the Administration to withdraw its appointment of Dr. Eric Keroack as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs. In this position Dr. Keroack – who has spent his career promoting abstinence-only education – would have control over the Title X program which funds low-cost, confidential family planning and health screening services that would otherwise be out of reach for millions of Americans.

"Given Dr. Keroack's ideological record on Title X services, we urge you to withdraw this appointment and select a Deputy Assistant Secretary who will vigorously administer Title X as intended by Congress under current law," wrote the Senators.

Dr. Keroack, a member of the Medical Advisory Council of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse, also serves as the medical director for five crisis pregnancy centers which are officially opposed to any form of contraception and has been involved in organizations whose materials the nonpartisan General Accounting Office (GAO) has found to be medically inaccurate and lacking scientific credibility.

The Bush Administration has a history of pushing ideology over science. At the urging of Administration, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) repeatedly blocked the over-the-counter application of the emergency contraceptive Plan B despite the overwhelming support of the agency's own advisory panel. The agency finally suggested approval only after a years-long fight with Congress led by Senators Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY).

The trumping of science by ideology is also illustrated with the only veto in President Bush's tenure – the veto of scientifically backed stem cell research.

"Unfortunately, this appointment is another example of the Administration allowing ideology to trump science, and it could jeopardize vital services on which large numbers of women and families depend," the letter says.

The letter to Secretary Leavitt was signed by Senators Patty Murray (D-WA), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Christopher Dodd (D-CT) Tom Harkin (D-IA), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), Harry Reid (D-NV), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), John Kerry (D-MA), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Russ Feingold (D-WI), Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), Barack Obama (D-IL) and Robert Menendez (D-NJ).

November 17, 2006

The Honorable Michael Leavitt
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

We write to express our strong concern over the appointment of Dr. Eric Keroack to be Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs. In this position, Dr. Keroack will have control over funding of programs under Title X of the Public Health Service Act, and its important goal of providing factual information and nondirective counseling for a broad range of family planning and reproductive services, including contraceptives, to women in need, without regard to age, income, or marital status.

Dr. Keroack has made a career out of promoting abstinence-only education and appears to be fundamentally opposed to contraception, and his public statements indicate hostility to Title X. He serves as the medical director for five crisis pregnancy centers which are officially opposed to any form of contraception.

Dr. Keroack is also a vocal supporter of abstinence-only programs to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease. He serves on the Medical Advisory Council of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse and is a member of the Federal Expert Panel commissioned to define the criteria and guidelines for grantees receiving funds under the Community-Based Abstinence Education Program, which, according to GAO provides information that may be medically inaccurate, and lacks proven scientific support. Although abstinence is an important component of comprehensive sexuality education, abundant evidence suggests that it is ineffective, unrealistic and potentially harmful to advocate abstinence as the sole option.

Unfortunately, this appointment is another example of the Administration allowing ideology to trump science, and it could jeopardize vital services on which large numbers of women and families depend. Given Dr. Keroack's ideological record on Title X services, we urge you to withdraw this appointment and select a Deputy Assistant Secretary who will vigorously administer Title X as intended by Congress under current law.

With respect and appreciation,

Sincerely,

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