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Surgeon General Calls Himself Backer Of Women's Rights

WASHINGTON (UPI) — The new U.S. surgeon general, Dr. C. Everett Koop, says he is a champion of women's rights and that charges to the contrary were part of a smoke screen used by those who opposed his strong anti-abortion stance.

In an interview last week after the Senate confirmed his nomination on a 68-24 vote, Koop also said he:

- Opposes most federal involvement in health services.

- Thinks the government's anti-smoking campaign is appropriate.

- Supports home health care as better for the patient and less costly for the taxpayer.

- Will work within the administration's budget cuts.

It was clear that Koop, once a leading voice in the anti-abortion movement, was irked by charges by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., that he opposes women's rights and lacks the experience to head the Public Health Service.

"The day I came to Washington, I told the secretary (of health and human services, Richard Schweiker) I had said and written all I should about abortion, my interests in this job were to get behind some of the health initiatives he had in mind, and I did not intend to be a speaker on the pro-life circuit as I had been in days gone by.

"I have stuck to that."

True to his word, he refused to answer questions about abortion.

"I don't think there is any doubt I was singled out," Koop said. "I truly believe the smoke screen of various reasons why I was not suitable for this job were just cover-up for the fact I had been an outspoken foe of abortion.

"I have done other things in my life, you know."

Koop, 65, was one of the first pediatric surgeons in the nation, has written 170 professional papers, and has worked on health projects in Third World countries.

"I look upon myself as a champion of women," he said. "I have trained more female pediatric surgeons than anyone else in this country. I have always stood for their rights."

Predecessors Luther Terry and Julius Richmond drew



Dr. C. Everett Koop

attention battling tobacco.

"Yes, I think that's a very appropriate function of government," Koop said of the \$2.5 million anti-smoking program ended by President Reagan. He said research is something government does well.

"If indeed the research paid for by the taxpayer turns up the fact that a specific way of life or lifestyle is in the long run deleterious to an individual's health, that taxpayer should be the recipient of any education we can give him to protect him," he said.

Koop took a conservative stand on Medicare and Medicaid.

"Well," he said, "we have them. When you have them it's very difficult to cut back on them because it takes so long to build alternative mechanisms. I certainly would favor a return to Medicare care by the private sector if it were possible, but I don't believe that complete shift is possible in the foreseeable future."

"I don't want to see a national health service," Koop added. "One has to be careful a catastrophic health insurance program isn't the thin edge of the wedge that leads on to a broader definition each year until everything is a catastrophe. But there are crippling financial circum-

stances to certain kinds of health no one family can pick up these days."

Koop said at his confirmation hearing that Assistant Health Secretary Edward Brant has given him responsibility over the disabled, the elderly and the commissioned corps of 7,200 Public Health Service doctors, nurses, sanitation engineers, veterinarians and other professionals.

He gave reporters this agenda:

- Noting this is the International Year of Disabled Persons, he said "I've spent my life with disabled children ... One way we can aid the situation is to examine where there might be duplication and overlap in the disability services, see if we cannot get rid of those, and thereby keep up the quality of services even with the reduced budget."

- The commissioned corps "has been under attack by the Office of Management and Budget," he said. "We will look to streamlining the corps."

- Noting the forthcoming White House Conference on Aging, he said "the problem this country faces in days ahead with an increasing percentage and absolute number of people over 65 means we have to, as a country, develop a health policy toward them."

As for budget cuts, he said it was "not my prerogative" to ask for more funds.

Koop said things were not "settled enough to know how" the consolidation of health programs into block grants will affect the Public Health Service "in actual dollars."

"It puts the onus of responsibility on the state and local authorities, who know better than the federal government what their priorities should be," he said. "They can serve the health needs with their own initiatives, rather than having us do it from this distance."

Koop recalled the case of Katie Beckett, a sick child Mr. Reagan talked about in his last press conference who had to stay in the hospital because Medicaid wouldn't pay for home health care. Koop said home health care has three great advantages.

"It puts the child back in the home, where the child belongs," he said. "It improves the child's psychological outlook because it is not institutionalized. It's ever so much cheaper."

from previous page

Brown said the co-payments would save as much as \$45 million a year. But critics have contended there would be no appreciable savings and predicted that many doctors would refuse to collect the money.

A proposal to deduct potential co-payment savings from doctors' Medi-Cal reimbursements was defeated in the Legislature.