



NGLTF, HRC Denounce Holsinger For US Surgeon General

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By Dennis McMillan

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and Human Rights Campaign (HRC) have announced their opposition to the nomination by President Bush of Dr. James W. Holsinger for U.S. Surgeon General. Dr. Holsinger is a University of Kentucky professor and a member of the United Methodist Judicial Council - the denomination's "Supreme Court."

In his role on the United Methodist Judicial Council, Holsinger opposed a decision to allow a lesbian to be an associate pastor, and he supported a pastor who would not permit an openly gay man to join the church. As a member of the Committee to Study Homosexuality in the United Methodist Church, Holsinger authored a 1991 paper titled "Pathophysiology of Male Homosexuality," which essentially equates homosexuality with disease in lurid terms.

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the Surgeon General is "America's chief health educator, giving Americans the best scientific information available on how to improve their health and reduce the risk of illness and injury."

"With the nomination of Dr. Holsinger for Surgeon General, the Bush administration is once again elevating ideology over public policy and once again throwing red meat to its ravenous anti-gay supporters," said NGLTF Executive Director Matt Foreman. "Dr. Holsinger's record shows that his own biases will not allow him to look objectively at scientific information." Foreman concluded, "Consequently, he is not qualified to be surgeon general, and we call upon the Senate to promptly reject his nomination."

"For the last 20 years, James Holsinger has been the worst kind of bully inside the United Methodist Church. As a member of a sexuality study team in 1991, he used his position as a medical doctor to promote skewed and inaccurate information regarding gay men," said the Rev. Troy Plummer, Executive Director of Reconciling Ministries Network of United Methodists and National Religious Leadership Roundtable member. "As the chair of the Judicial Council, the 'Supreme Court' of the United Methodist Church, he has used his power to disregard the Constitution of the Methodist Church and block from membership faithful gay and lesbian Christians. As a pastor, he has promoted 'reparative therapy' — a practice that is nothing short of torture of gay and lesbian people and is not condoned by any professional psychological association; in fact, many call it medical malpractice." Plummer added, "In short, when he has been called to be a leader in the United Methodist Church, to offer the hand of Christian fellowship, he has slammed the door in the face of faithful gay and lesbian persons. What, then, might he do as Surgeon General?" He said, "As the primary medical educator of our nation, I have no faith that Holsinger would refrain from these practices, which are unscientific at best and torturous at worst. When Holsinger's 'all' does not mean 'all' in the Methodist Church, can it mean 'all' for American citizens?" Plummer said he worried what kind of education from the Surgeon

General could gay and lesbian families expect, and what could bisexual and transgender people expect. He concluded, "As a psychotherapist, a pastor, and an American citizen myself, I can only hope that James Holsinger will not be given the opportunity to use the office of the Surgeon General as a bully pulpit for hatred."

"Dr. Holsinger has a record that is unworthy of America's doctor," said Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese. "His writings suggest a scientific view rooted in anti-gay beliefs that are incompatible with the job of serving the medical health of all Americans. It is essential that America's top doctor value sound science over anti-gay ideology."

Additionally, Dr. Holsinger and his wife were founders of Hope Springs Community Church, which, according to the church's pastor, ministers to people who no longer wish to be gay or lesbian. The pastor, Rev. David Calhoun, said that the church has an "ex-gay" ministry. "We see that as an issue not of orientation but a lifestyle," Calhoun said. "We have people who seek to walk out of that lifestyle."

This type of "ex-gay" conversion therapy has been condemned by almost every major, reputable medical organization – including the American Psychological Association, which issued a condemnation over ten years ago. "Although the church's theology isn't being nominated, this discredited practice purports to be a psychological and medical service, and if Dr. Holsinger is involved in any way, it conflicts with his duty to accept and promote sound science in the interest of public health," continued Solmonese. He said HRC is hopeful that during the hearing process, Congress will fully examine Dr. Holsinger's background and that part of that examination will include issues affecting the queer community, including his stance on conversion therapy. "Too often, we have seen President Bush send nominees to Congress that have proven their inability to separate their personal beliefs from their professional duties," said Solmonese. "As the nation's chief medical doctor, the office of Surgeon General is an extremely important position that has an impact on the lives of gay and lesbian Americans, and the hearing process should involve a discussion about where Dr. Holsinger stands on medical issues relating to our community."