

No to Surgeon General Pick

EDITORIAL

Friday, July 13, 2007

Tell Senate that Dr. Holsinger won't heal what ails America

In case you missed our headlines from last month (it was Pride season, so perhaps you were distracted), let's review President Bush's nominee for the country's 18th surgeon general, Dr. James Holsinger.

As we go to press on Thursday morning, Holsinger goes before the Senate health committee for confirmation hearings. A lot of questions must be answered (and asked).

When Bush floated his name back in May as a surgeon general hopeful, LGBT press and bloggers jumped on the fact that Holsinger backed the ex-gay movement in a big way. He founded Hope Springs Church in Kentucky, a facility that runs a ministry to change gays to straights—"Pray the gay away!"—and he penned a 1991 paper titled "Pathophysiology of Male Homosexuality" that was backed by the United Methodist Church. In that paper, he said that gay sex did not conform to anatomical norms and claimed that it lead to health risks and sexually transmitted infections. (What about lesbian sex, or heterosexual anal sex? The irrational fears about male-on-male intercourse proliferate.)

The mainstream press has caught onto this man's incompetence and has finally devoted more ink to questioning Holsinger's credentials.

In an editorial this week titled "A Nominee's Abnormal Views," the New York Times writes that the Senate committee "must determine whether Dr. Holsinger holds these benighted views today. The Senate should not confirm a surgeon general who considers practicing homosexuals abnormal and diseased."

As much as we agreed, we also cringed at the Times' choice of words. We weren't the only ones. Jerry Douglas, M.D., in a letter to the editor the following day wrote: "I, for one, never 'practiced' homosexuality but am simply gay. ... The term 'practicing' seems to try to be in opposition to celibate homosexuals. That does not make those individuals less gay, but it does mean that they are not sexually active with others. Is that what you meant? If so, what does celibacy have to do with it?"

A second letter writer praised Holsinger and recommended his confirmation. Let's hope this view will be in the minority. The American Public Health Association, made up of 50,000 public health professionals, released a statement opposing Bush's surgeon general pick. The APHA wrote that it is "very concerned with Dr. Holsinger's past writings regarding his views of homosexuality, which put his political and religious ideology before established medical science." This marks the second time ever, and the first in 26 years, that the group has opposed a U.S. surgeon general nominee.

As expected, LGBT advocacy groups such as the Human Rights Campaign and the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** have spoken against Holsinger.

Former surgeon general Jocelyn Elders voiced concerns as well. She told blogger Frank Lockwood: "It would be very difficult for me to feel that this is the person that we should be confirming in this day and time with all the problem we have, related to sexual health and all the problems we're getting into. I think as the nation's chief health educator we need to know what he would do to help America evolve into a sexually healthy nation. We're a sexually unhealthy nation."

Another former surgeon general has been making headlines, too. Dr. Richard Carmona said this week that the Bush Administration played party politics with his post, muzzling him on areas such as safe sex, stem-cell research and mental health issues.

If Holsinger was unable to distinguish between science and religion back in 1991 Kentucky, there is no chance he'll stand up to the political ideology of the White House.

You should let the 21 members of the Senate health committee know this. Their official web site is <http://help.senate.gov/>. E-mail them.
It'll be good for you.