



washington view

by Heather L. Smith, Legislative Affairs Manager

108th Congress: Convenes with Conservatives in Control What does this mean for our issues?

With anti-choice/family planning foes now controlling both houses of Congress, indications are that family planning, reproductive rights and even environmental conservation all face far greater threats than in past years. President Bush and his congressional supporters will likely use their substantially increased power to roll back international and domestic family planning assistance, contraceptive equity for federal employees, access to emergency contraception, comprehensive sexuality education and abortion rights.

House and Senate Leadership

Returning Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-IL) and new Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) have records of opposition to voluntary family planning programs both at home and abroad. On the Democratic side, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (CA) and Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle (SD) both have strong records in support of family planning and reproductive health issues.

Committee Assignments

House Republicans have drawn preliminary plans for committee assignments and the forecast is not good. Rep. Henry Hyde (IL) will continue to head the House International Relations Committee, which maintains jurisdiction over foreign policy including population programs. Known for his opposition to family planning, Rep. Hyde opposes U.S. aid for population assistance overseas and is expected to use his committee as a platform to further attack international population assistance program.

Anti-environmental protection lawmakers will chair two key committees, both with jurisdiction over environmental conservation programs. Rep. Billy Tauzin (LA) will chair the

Energy and Commerce Committee and Rep. Richard Pombo (CA) will take the gavel of the Resources Committee. Rep. Pombo's career has been marked by property rights crusades against federal control of public lands and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which he attempted to gut in 1995, only to be reined in by then-Speaker Newt Gingrich. Expect early battles on such issues as drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and reform of endangered species laws.

At the pinnacle of power on Capitol Hill are assignments to the congressional purse strings, the Appropriations Committee. No matter what program Congress authorizes, nothing will get done without the Appropriations Committee allocating the money. Rep. Bill Young (FL) will again chair this powerful committee and, although not an outspoken critic of population issues, family planning programs are expected to be on the chopping block as the White House places extreme pressure on Congressman Young to cut spending for key programs.

With Rep. Jim Kolbe (AZ) remaining chair of the subcommittee on Foreign Operations, a small glimmer of hope does exist for international population assistance supporters. With jurisdiction over the international family planning assistance program, aid to UNFPA, and other development assistance programs, Rep. Kolbe, a strong advocate of international population assistance issues, is expected to push for our programs. On the domestic side, Rep. Ralph Regula (OH), who has a mixed record on family planning issues, is on tap to once again head the Labor-Health-Education subcommittee.

In the Senate, there will be little change in regard to committee assignments. Sen. Ted Stevens (AK), who has a mixed voting record

on population issues, will preside over the Senate Appropriations Committee. Family planning supporter Sen. Arlen Specter (PA) will remain as chair of the Labor-Health-Education Subcommittee. Sen. Mitch McConnell (KY) will stay on as the head of Foreign Operations subcommittee.

Sen. Richard Lugar (IN), a foe of international family planning and ratification of the CEDAW (the International Women's Treaty), will take over as chair of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee. His ascension to chairman could be a further setback for the ratification of the 22-year-old CEDAW treaty aimed at promoting equality for women.

On the environmental front, Sen. James Inhofe (OK) will take charge as head of the Environment and Public Works Committee. Under the reign of Inhofe, a former real estate developer, the committee will be noticeably more receptive to business, rather than environmental, concerns.

In other bad news, Sen. Judd Gregg (NH) will take over the top job as chair of the Senate's Health Committee, with jurisdiction over women's health issues including contraceptive equity issues. An outspoken critic of mandating insurance

plans to include coverage for contraceptives, Sen. Gregg's leadership helped derail efforts to move contraceptive equity legislation out of the committee in the last Congress.

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Appointees: President Bush's Latest Attack Against Family Planning

President Bush continued his relentless attack on women's reproductive health and rights when he recently named several appointees with opposition to birth control to the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Advisory Committee for Reproductive Health Drugs. The committee reviews and evaluates data on the safety and effectiveness of drugs used in the practice of obstetrics and gynecology and related specialties, and makes recommendations to the FDA Commissioner. Appointments to the committee do not require Senate confirmation.

The most notable of Bush's appointees is anti-choice Dr. W. David Hager, an obstetrician-gynecologist at the University of Kentucky who has

questioned the safety of the drug mifepristone commonly known as the abortion pill RU-486. Last year Dr. Hager assisted the Christian Medical Association in petitioning the FDA to shelve mifepristone. He has written several books in which he extols the power of prayer to heal medical conditions. Specifically, Dr. Hager co-authored, with his wife Linda, *Stress and the Woman's Body*, which recommends specific Scripture readings and prayers for such ailments as headaches and premenstrual syndrome.

Other presidential appointees include Dr. Joseph B. Stanford, who is so extreme in his views that he refuses to prescribe "contraceptives of any sort." Dr. Stanford has erroneously classified some forms of the birth control pill as potential abortifacients. And appointee Susan A. Crockett, M.D. is an at-large board member of the American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists, which has expressed their opposition to all forms of contraceptives. Additionally, a fourth appointee, Vivian Lewis, M.D., has called for more stringent controls on mifepristone, one of the most tested and safest drugs available to women.

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Bush's Decisions Are About Women's Rights, Not Abortion

Once we realize that this Bush war is not about abortion, but about women's rights, the fact that the Bush administration systematically neglects family planning begins to make more sense. President Bush's fiscal year 2003 budget proposes no increase whatsoever in domestic family planning and reproductive health programs that are already woefully under-funded. He opposes emergency contraception, which could dramatically reduce recourse to abortion.

In fact, the administration promotes action primarily after pregnancy has already occurred, namely, parental notification (even if parents are abusive), adoption, 24-hour waiting periods and the abolition of so-called partial-birth abortions.

The recent suggestion of Dr. W. David Hager to head the Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee of the Food and Drug Administration clearly shows how the White House thinks about the rights of women. (See Washington View above.)

While Bush has said he supports equality for women frequently, his

actions consistently show otherwise. He will continue to chip away at women's reproductive rights and human rights, and the new conservative-controlled Congress will likely support his efforts. Advocates must continue to press pro-choice Democrats and Republicans to fight for women's rights, starting with reinstating the UNFPA funding, so that women and girls worldwide can have access to the information and services they need to survive.

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