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Monday *MONITOR*

Monday, February 4, 2008

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PRO-ACTIVE PREVENTION BILLS HEARD IN COMMITTEE

SB778 (Justus)—Cervical Cancer Immunization—was heard in Seniors, Families and Public Health on Tuesday. This bill requires MO-DHSS to mail information to the parents or guardians of all females entering the 6th grade about the connection between HPV and cervical cancer and the availability of the HPV vaccine. This bill does not require the vaccine for admission to school, but does require health insurance companies to provide coverage for females between the ages of 11 and 21—the FDA recommended group most in need of this. Concerned Women for America was the only witness testifying in opposition.

Also on Tuesday, **HB1504** (Head Walton)—Expedited Partner Therapy—was heard in Health Care Policy. This bill would allow a licensed physician to treat the partner of a patient diagnosed with Chlamydia or Gonorrhea without an ‘intervening medical evaluation or professional prevention counseling.’ The antibiotics would be dispensed in pill form. This policy would be limited to health districts with high case rates for the STIs. No one spoke in opposition.

TWO RESTRICTIVE BILLS TO BE HEARD ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5

HB1625 (Emery)—Pharmacy Denial—will be heard in Health Care Policy. One of Governor Blunt’s priorities, this bill would protect pharmacies from recrimination if employees of the pharmacy refuse to dispense contraception. HB 1625 also incorrectly defines emergency contraception as an abortifacient even though it was approved by the FDA as a contraceptive and would allow a pharmacist to refuse to dispense ‘RU486’—even though this medication is not available through a pharmacy, but only under direct contract between the manufacturer and the abortion provider.

HB1339 (Muschany)—Discrimination Against Abortion Providers—will be heard in Judiciary. This bill singles out health care providers that perform abortions and excludes them from any civil liability protections.

NEW BILLS FILED

HB1831 (Onder); **SB1058** (Mayer)—Targeted Requirements of Abortion Providers. These long, checklist bills contain numerous new, burdensome and unnecessary requirements for counseling, evaluating, and performing abortion procedures that—according to the proponents—are to ‘protect women,’ but which will more likely push them later into pregnancy. The bills also create the new crime of “coercing an abortion.”

HB1795 (Pollock)—Criminal Pregnancy. This bill, like two others filed this year, contradicts current statute (passed in 1991) which, rather than imposing criminal sanctions, requires pregnant women with drug or alcohol problems be given priority access to treatment and prenatal care to increase the chances of a healthy birth. Studies have demonstrated that, *even while continuing prenatal substance use*, obtaining prenatal care reduces the risk of premature birth and increases health outcomes. A jail cell does not. The legislature’s time would be better spent funding more treatment programs.

CHILI FOR CHOICE EVENT DRAWS BIG CROWD

Kansas City’s Chili for Choice event commemorating the 35th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* was a huge success. More than 125 activists attended this lively celebration on January 29 and Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri raised \$4200.00 in support of reproductive freedom.

SAVE THE DATES:

Planned Parenthood Day of Action—Tuesday, February 12, 2008—Jefferson City
Lobby for Women’s Health and Lives—Tuesday, March 4, 2008—Jefferson City

SAY WHAT?

“(W)e must trust patients and doctors to make medical decisions...(W)e will help ensure that decisions about your medical care are made in the privacy of your doctor’s office—not in the halls of Congress.”

George W. Bush, State of the Union, January 28, 2008

Supporters of women’s reproductive healthcare and the right to choose might be forgiven for thinking these words were taken from a Planned Parenthood press release. This was in fact a statement made by President Bush during his final State of the Union address. Yet, in his 7 years in office, President Bush has made government intrusion in women’s reproductive health care decisions a centerpiece of his policy agenda. This year, with no need to scramble for votes, perhaps the President could heed his own words and help Put Prevention First!

VITTER ATTACKS ABORTION; ANTI-CHOICE AMENDMENT ON INDIAN HEALTH BILL

During the Senate’s consideration of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, Senator Vitter (R-LA) offered an amendment to the Indian Health Care Improvement Act Amendments of 2007 (S.1200) to restrict the use of Indian Health Service (IHS) funds to perform abortions, except in cases of rape or incest, or if the life of the woman is endangered. Senator Vitter’s amendment would essentially “recodify” the Hyde Amendment in Indian Health Service (IHS) law. The Hyde Amendment – which has been in force since 1977 – prohibits federal funding for abortion care except in limited circumstances. It is an unjust policy that endangers the health of women who depend on the government for their health care, including Native American women.

Apart from being bad public health policy, the Vitter amendment is duplicative of current law and does nothing but politicize an important debate on comprehensive health care for Native Americans. A vote is possible on the Vitter amendment sometime next week, once the Senate returns to the debate of the Indian Health bill.

ANTI-CHOICE JUDICIAL NOMINEE RICHARD HONAKER

Attorney Richard H. Honaker has been nominated to the U.S. District Court for Wyoming and will have a hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee on February 12th. Honaker’s record demonstrates unequivocal hostility to women’s constitutionally protected right to abortion, including when their health is at stake, and, as a lawmaker and a lawyer, a total disregard for Supreme Court precedent establishing that right.

As a member of the Wyoming House in the early 1990s, Honaker actively sought to outlaw abortion. In 1991, he introduced the “Human Life Protection Act,” which would have banned all abortions with exceptions only for the woman’s life or in cases of incest or rape--*if* the woman reported the rape within five days. Although Honaker’s bill died in committee, he did not stop there. The following year, he introduced a similar version of the bill which also failed. Honaker also served as counsel to the Unseen Hands Prayer Circle PAC, an anti-choice committee working to put his “Human Life Protection Act” on the statewide ballot. While the group succeeded in putting the initiative on the ballot in 1994, Wyoming voters soundly rejected it, with less than 40% supporting the abortion ban.

KS JUDGE DENIES ATTEMPT TO DISQUALIFY ATTORNEYS FROM REPRESENTING PPKM

On January 16, a Kansas state court judge denied a motion by Johnson County District Attorney Phill Kline to bar two attorneys and their firm from representing Comprehensive Health of Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri in Kline’s criminal prosecution of the clinic. In October 2007, Kline filed an outrageous 107-count complaint against Comprehensive Health, alleging that it falsified records and violated the Kansas abortion law that regulates abortion performed after 22 weeks. Kline attempted to disqualify the attorneys on the grounds that he would be calling them as witnesses to respond to his recordkeeping charges.