

Rep. Slaughter Calls on von Eschenbach to Take a Stand on Plan B

FDA Needs a Commissioner Who Will Support Science Before Politics

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today called on newly nominated Andrew C. von Eschenbach to determine a course of action on the issue of emergency contraception. The morning-after pill, or Plan B, which has been determined safe and was recommended to be made available without a prescription by both the Food and Drug Administration staff and an expert advisory panel, is an important women's issue. The former Commissioner of the FDA, Lester Crawford, put off making a decision on the morning-after pill, and in August 2005, the FDA affirmed that more study was needed, despite the findings of the panel. Crawford's resignation - shortly following this decision - resulted in the temporary appointment of von Eschenbach, who has now been nominated to act as permanent commissioner of the FDA.

The failure of von Eschenbach to take an affirmative stand on either side of the emergency contraception issue serves to undermine the authority of the FDA, and calls into question his capacity to adhere to science over politics. At a hearing of the House Appropriations subcommittee on labor, health and human services, von Eschenbach excused the delay regarding the morning after pill saying that the agency was still reviewing comments received. The FDA would suggest that as von Eschenbach has not been directly involved with this matter, it should not interfere with his nomination. This attempt to skirt the issue should not be taken lightly, and von Eschenbach's failure to propose even a time frame for making a decision on Plan B emergency contraception should serve as a red flag to the Senate.

Rep. Louise Slaughter stated, "The morning-after pill has been proven safe by the FDA and their own expert panel. Andrew von Eschenbach's refusal to breach this topic demonstrates a clear contempt for the value of science. He is clearly opting to adhere to a political agenda, and as a nominee set to serve as the permanent commissioner of the FDA, this disregard for the findings of the scientific community cannot be allowed."

