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Prehistoric Pregnancy Planning

By Jordan Smith

Once again, President George W. Bush has managed to find a real live dinosaur to appoint as administrator of federal family-planning funds: Last week he tapped **Susan Orr**, a former official with the Family Research Council, to head up the Department of Health and Human Services **Office of Population Affairs**, which handles roughly \$283 million in **Title X welfare funding** used to provide family-planning health-care services, including birth control, to more than 5 million low-income and uninsured women every year. The problem is Orr doesn't exactly believe in birth control: While with the FRC, Orr derided a growing national movement to mandate contraceptive coverage in health-insurance policies, telling *The Weekly Standard* in June 2000 that such a move is "not about choice" and "not about health care" but is really "about making everyone collaborators with the culture of death." And in 2001, Orr applauded a Bush administration proposal to eliminate such coverage from federal employees' health insurance. "We're quite pleased, because fertility is not a disease," she told *The Washington Post*. And birth control is "not a medical necessity." Of course, women who use birth-control pills to treat other medical issues might well disagree – along with the 98% of American women who use birth control at some point to plan and manage their reproductive lives. In all, Orr's public views on family planning are seriously out-of-step with the mainstream, says **Sarah Wheat**, vice president for community affairs for Planned Parenthood of the Texas Capital Region. "It's such a sign of disrespect. Clearly, Bush is more interested in sending a message to his right-wing base" than in providing solid family-planning health services to poor women, Wheat says.

Bush named Orr(asaurus) to replace **Dr. Eric Keroack**, who stepped down from the federal family-planning position in April after Medicaid officials initiated an investigation into his private practice in Massachusetts. Keroack, a staunch believer in abstinence-only sex education, served as the medical director for the group **A Woman's Concern**, which operates crisis pregnancy centers around Boston that do not provide referrals for, or access to, birth control; its policy on contraceptives describes birth control as "demeaning to women" and "adverse to human health and happiness." Keroack's résumé didn't impress women's health advocates or other groups – including the Union of Concerned Scientists and Catholics for a Free Choice – who joined in calling for his ouster.

Unfortunately, the Orr appointment hasn't exactly extinguished that ire, and on Oct. 18, Senators Hillary Clinton, D-NY, and Patty Murray, D-Wash., joined Planned Parenthood Federation of

America President **Cecile Richards** in calling on Bush to can Orr: "This appointment sends a message to women across this country: Ideology trumps women's health care in the Bush administration," Clinton told reporters. "The American people deserve a qualified public health expert who will serve women's health instead of serving an ideological and political agenda."

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