January 24, 2005
Testimony in opposition to SB 203

SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE & SAFETY
EXHIBIT NO. 10
DATE 1-24-05
BILL NO. SB 203

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

My name is Eric Schiedermayer. I represent the Montana Catholic Conference, the voice for Montana's two Roman Catholic bishops in the state legislature, who in turn are the spiritual leaders of over 140,000 Montanans. Today I also represent my wife of 25 years and my eight children, including my five daughters. I rise in strong opposition to this bill.

The Catholic Church has a long and proud tradition of serving those most in need. For centuries, Catholic organizations have provided services to the disadvantaged, including the homeless, elderly, AIDS victims, immigrants and unwed mothers, to name only a few. These services are an important part of the Catholic faith tradition, and have made our country, state and world a better place to live.

We support efforts to ensure that all people have access to health care that affirms human life and dignity. However, we cannot support mandated coverage of services and prescriptions that are in direct contradiction of our tenets and values. Proponents have presented this as an issue of equality and fairness. These arguments completely miss the point of our most serious objection to this bill: it is an extremely serious infringement of religious freedom.

Our opposition to the mandated coverage is not merely based upon our moral objections to contraception in general, but also rests on our concerns regarding the abortifacient quality of some of the contraceptives that the bill covers. By inhibiting implantation in the uterus, many contraceptives actually terminate newly created life by making the uterus of a woman hostile to a newly conceived embryo seeking to implant. So a bill mandating contraceptive coverage in fact mandates abortion as well. How long before surgical abortion is included in the mandate?

This bill forces people of faith to fund chemically-induced abortions, puts matters of personal convenience and choice on the same level of as medically-necessary treatment, requires coverage of drugs which can endanger the safety of women, and increases insurance costs for employers and individuals.

Medically speaking, when a mother's egg and a father's sperm join, a new human being is created. Utilizing a chemical drug to block the tiny baby's ability to attach itself to the mother's uterine wall kills the child. It can come in forms such as "the Pill," "Norplant," "the Morning-after Pill" - each can end the life of a newly-formed human being.

Forcing everyone to pay for contraceptives violates individually-held religious beliefs of many Montanans and directly affects insurance plans offered by religious organizations or employers. Many, including the Catholic Church, would have to violate closely-held tenets of their religious beliefs, or simply stop offering medical coverage completely. Many groups with strong moral principles will choose the latter.

Aside from the moral and religious objections to forced coverage of abortion-causing drugs, there's also the practical argument against such a policy. Birth control for personal convenience is not medically necessary. Also, birth control itself is not without its health risks. Numerous studies have associated use of "the pill" among young women with an increased risk of breast cancer.

Finally, despite assurances from today's proponents to the contrary, if companies are forced to pay for these items, the cold reality is that there will be less money available for medically-necessary treatment such as prenatal care, mammograms and childhood immunizations.

In the end, mandatory birth control coverage is bad public policy. It decreases the chances that health insurance will remain affordable and readily accessible for working class families, forces people of strong morals and faith to pay for drug-induced chemical abortions, places personal convenience products on a par with life-saving medical technology, sets a precedent for further mandates in the future, and takes us one step further as a society down the path of devaluing human life.

Respectfully submitted,
Eric Schiedermayer
Executive Director, Montana Catholic Conference