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## Steamroll

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"Silver needs to explain to Roman Catholics why he thinks their rights are being pushed too far (after all, whose freedoms was he thinking of?)," Donohoe's printed statement read. "Though he may not have meant it that way such language strikes us as being downright anti-Catholic."

When asked how the speaker felt about having his remarks characterized as being "anti-Catholic," Silver's spokeswoman, Eileen Larrabee, did not respond directly.

"The speaker has always had a constructive relationship with the Catholic conference," she said, adding that Silver would be meeting in the next few weeks with conference members to discuss "a variety of issues."

Poust said the conscience clauses would be at the forefront of the state bishops' agenda when they meet with Gov. George Pataki March 5 in anticipation of the conference's annual lobbying day March 13. The day will draw more than 800 church representatives from around the state to lobby legislators on a variety of issues. If the Assembly-Senate bills pass both chambers without conscience clauses, the bishops will ask the governor to veto the bills. If the governor doesn't, the church leaders are prepared to take their objections into the judicial system, Poust said.

Pataki has opposed the state's bishops on the death penalty and abortion, Poust noted, and has given no clear sign where he stands on conscience clauses. The state's bishops, including Bishop Matthew H. Clark, however, made it clear in a recent statement they all signed that they see the Assembly bills as a direct assault on freedom of religion.

"We can think of no governmental action at this time so unwarranted or intrusive as the requirement that religiously-affiliated employers or insurers pay for or provide coverage for procedures which violate the tenets of their religious faith," the bishops wrote, adding: "A law which would compel us to do what we sincerely believe is morally wrong violates our free exercise of religion and undermines all that we do in the name of faith."

## Allies

The church is not alone in its opposition

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to health insurance mandates it finds morally wrong. At least two other religiously oriented groups statewide have raised objections to the Assembly's actions.

Agudath Israel of America, an Orthodox Jewish organization based in New York City, released a Feb. 9 statement it sent to the Assembly-Senate joint committee currently working on the legislation. The statement criticized the lack of a conscience clause in the Assembly bill mandating contraception coverage.

"New York has been a leader in recognizing that where there is a tension between a generally applicable provision of secular law and the mandates of religious faith, the religious liberty interest ought typically to prevail," the Agudath Israel statement read. The statement went on to exemplify its contention by pointing out that no doctors are ever compelled to perform abortions, and autopsies are generally not performed on people whose religious beliefs were known to oppose autopsies.

On that note, the Assembly's bills threaten more than just institutional religious freedom. They threaten individual religious freedom as well, according to the Rev. Duane Motley, an independent Baptist minister from Spencerport who directs New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms Ltd., a lobbying group representing evangelical Christians in New York state. Rev. Motley noted he's shoulder-to-shoulder with the state's bishops on the insurance mandates issue, and agreed with Poust's contention that the proposed mandates would also create conscience conflicts for any business or organization that finds covering contraception or infertility treatments wrong.

Rev. Motley added that if the Assembly's versions of these bills become law, they may have the unintended effect of forcing employers to consider dropping health insurance altogether for their employees rather than participating in plans they consider immoral. This would also come at a time when the state is seeking to attract new businesses, he said, not drive them away with

more moral, and, for that matter, financial burdens.

"So many of these legislators have never been in business that they have no idea what burdens they're putting onto business people," the minister said.

That point was echoed by Leslie Moran, senior vice president of the New York Health Plan Association, which represents 28 health plans covering 6 million New Yorkers. In a phone interview from her Albany office, Moran said that while her lobbying group applauds the state's efforts to try to increase health insurance coverage for women, it disagrees with compelling businesses and insurers to offer any kind of mandated benefits.

"Small businesses are struggling to afford health insurance now," she said, "and we agree that an unintended effect may be seen in a large number of businesses saying: 'We can't do it anymore, we can't offer health insurance anymore.'"

## Whose choice?

Regardless of the proposed mandates' potential effects on businesses' bottom lines, the church remains opposed to such mandates primarily on moral grounds. Since 1998, almost half the states in the

union have passed laws that require coverage for contraceptives in prescription insurance plans, and most of those states have included some form of conscience clause in their legislation.

Pro-choice groups like the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League and Planned Parenthood have been promoting legislation both at the federal and state levels compelling insurers to cover contraception. Such groups have argued that many health plans cover anti-impotence drugs for men but don't cover contraceptives for women, and these groups consider this to be a form of discrimination against women. However, according to data compiled by the U.S. Catholic Conference, which serves in part as the lobbying arm of the nation's bishops, more than 90 percent of the country's managed-care insurers offer contraceptive coverage.

"(T)hese data indicate there is no shortage of plans covering contraceptives for people who want such coverage," said Cathy Deeds, a public policy analyst with the USCC's pro-life office, in a press statement. "The only purpose of (mandates)-being pushed by pro-abortion groups is to force such coverage on plans, employers and families who do not want it."

Poust pointed out that non-Catholics working for the church have to accept the fact that they won't be able to get contraceptives under their insurance plan.

"Working with the church does entail with it some limitations imposed by the beliefs of the church," he said. "We are not preventing our (employees) from obtaining or using contraception. We are saying that we can't be providers of that contraception."

## Cardinals

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Allan Mix, even dyed his hair red for the event — a cardinal-red buzz cut — to honor new Cardinal Francisco Errazuriz Ossa of Santiago.

The three U.S. cardinals said the ceremonies were a joyful, emotional and even humbling experience. Cardinal Egan said he was joining an institution whose members have often suffered for the church.

Cardinal McCarrick said he was impressed with the "vast variety" of experience and talent in the College of Cardinals.

"They are so different. That is the fasci-

nating thing," he said. "Not only do they come from different places and different backgrounds, but they have different points of view that are the product of their life experiences."

Cardinal Dulles said: "It's a humbling experience to be part of this august body."

Pope John Paul let the cardinals know he would be calling them into a special consistory in May, to listen to their advice on a wide variety of issues as the church enters the third millennium.

Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga said the meeting was expected to last three to four days, with an agenda based on the pope's recent apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*.

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