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## **FDA CHOKES ON 'PLAN B' PILL MORNING-AFTER PILL BECOMES POLITICAL FOOTBALL**

FOOL ME once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me" is an old saw that George W. Bush likes to mangle.

We were reminded of that homily Monday when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration sent out a press release saying it would work with the makers of the Plan B contraceptive - the so-called "morning after" pill - to see if it could be offered over the counter to women 18 and over.

Emergency contraception (EC) can prevent pregnancy if taken within 120 hours of unprotected sex. It is a critical need for rape victims and for others whose contraception may have failed.

EC is available over the counter regardless of age in 45 other countries. There is no legitimate question of its safety.

The FDA's announcement may have looked like the agency finally is being guided by actual science rather than the religious and political ideology that led it to delay approving the drug for over-the-counter sales for three years.

But it came one day before Andrew von Eschenbach's Senate confirmation hearing as FDA Commissioner. Eschenbach had been acting commissioner for 11 months without trying to resolve the impasse. And the wording of the press release said only that the FDA was willing to discuss the issue, not actually do anything about it.

That matters because of what happened with former FDA head Lester Crawford. Last year, Sens. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., and Patty Murray, D-Wash., angered at what was then two years of delay on Plan B, put a "hold" on Crawford's nomination, preventing a vote. When Crawford promised to make a decision on Plan B by last Sept. 1, they lifted it, and Crawford was confirmed.

But Crawford reneged and the FDA continued to delay. When Crawford resigned soon afterward, Eschenbach became acting commissioner and the senators reinstated their hold.

Then, after asserting at his hearing Tuesday that the FDA would make decisions based on "sound science," Eschenbach provided no scientific reason for the latest proposal to restrict nonprescription Plan B to women over 18.

Clinton and Murray are hanging tough, refusing to lift the hold and get fooled again.

Eschenbach's confirmation should be delayed just as long as the FDA continues its unjustified delay on making Plan B available without a prescription.