

Benjamin confirmed as Surgeon General

Written by Special to the NNPA from the Afro-American Newspapers
Thursday, 05 November 2009 16:01



WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Dr. Regina Benjamin was unanimously confirmed by the U.S. Senate on October 29 as the next U.S. surgeon general, making the Black Alabama physician the nation's top doctor.

"She will be an integral part of our H1N1 response effort, and America can expect to see her very soon communicating important information about how to stay healthy and safe this flu season," Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said in a statement.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, (D-NV), had complained that Republicans were holding the surgeon general confirmation over unrelated issues, according to the New York Times. A subsequent voice vote elevated Benjamin to the post.

Benjamin has a long history of public service as a family physician. She received the Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights and a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant, and was the first Black woman to head a state medical society.

Benjamin became nationally known for her struggle to keep her Bayou La Batre Rural Health Clinic on Alabama's Gulf Coast open to serve approximately 4,000 local residents after the area was devastated by Hurricane Katrina and again by Hurricane Rita.

Benjamin is the third African American woman to be U.S. surgeon general. The first African American woman to be appointed surgeon general was Vice Admiral M. Joycelyn Elders, who was confirmed by Congress in 1993. Elders was also the first African American of either sex ever appointed to that position.

Benjamin will be the fourth African American to become U.S. surgeon general since 1993, and the 18th U.S. surgeon general since John M. Woodworth was appointed by President Ulysses S. Grant as the first surgeon general in 1871.