While all eyes are glued to the health care debate, one senator decided to take a swipe at an old target: the Mexico City Policy.

The Reagan-era Mexico City Policy was designed to get the U.S. out of the international abortion business. Under this policy, international organizations that perform, promote, or lobby for the legalization of abortion are ineligible for U.S. tax dollars. The idea behind the Policy is that abortion is always and everywhere a controversial act, which the majority of Americans object to being funded with their tax dollars.

The policy has been alternately rescinded or reinstated since Reagan, depending upon who the President is and where his sympathies lie on the life issues. Not surprisingly, Barack Obama tossed out the Policy within his first week in office, opening up federal funding to abortion groups worldwide.

This was apparently not enough for Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ). As a member of the Senate appropriations committee, Lautenberg decided to go one step further: he introduced an amendment in the 2010 Senate Foreign Operations Spending Bill that would permanently rescind the Mexico City Policy.

According to the Congressional Quarterly, Lautenberg offered the amendment in order to “end the uncertainty that foreign aid recipients face whenever control of the White House shifts between parties.”

“Health care providers across the globe,” Lautenberg added, “should be able to care for the health of women and families without ideological obstacles blocking the way.”

The irony of this statement seems lost on Lautenberg, whose opposition to the Mexico City Policy is at direct odds with the majority of the American people. According to a Gallup poll conducted directly after the move, even the dazzingly popular president was not immune from public ire when he rescinded the Mexico City Policy. The move was the most unpopular of his presidency at the time, with 58 percent of Americans registering disapproval (as
opposed to the beggarly 35 percent who thought it was a good idea).

Add to that the fact that the Mexico City Policy doesn’t even block medical aid at all, and that many legitimate NGOs have managed to retain their government funding within its abortion restrictions.

In fact, the primary groups that have lost funding are organizations like the International Planned Parenthood Federation, whose bread and butter is (gasp) performing and promoting abortion worldwide. It is no mystery why these organizations would vehemently oppose the Mexico City Policy, and spend time, talent and resources making the case that abortion is an integral part of health care.

In the face of this, Lautenberg’s platitudes about “ideological obstacles” ring even more hollow.

This entire debate crystallizes the ideological disconnect between politicians like Lautenberg (and, by extension, Obama), and the majority of the American people. The Mexico City Policy does not exist to block health care. It does not exist to kill or maim women. It exists because someone understood that, for most Americans, abortion is not really health care at all, but rather, the death of an innocent child.

And while the nation as a whole may still be wrestling with this issue, the government can at least have the decency not to spend public funds in support of a practice that so many find abhorrent. That Lautenberg would continue to insist that the Policy blocks health care does nothing more than make obvious whose ideological pocket he is in.