

# Supreme Court nominee scrutinized over abortion

By Liz Schevtchuk  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Take it from the president himself: Passing an abortion "litmus test" was not a requirement for his Supreme Court nominee.

But that doesn't mean some activists on both sides of the abortion issue wouldn't like to see the results of such a test.

Soon after President George Bush nominated Judge David H. Souter for the Supreme Court, determining where the jurist stands on abortion became the best guessing game in Washington, with uneasiness in both anti-abortion and pro-abortion camps.

According to Bush, who tapped Souter July 23 to fill the vacancy left by the retirement of Justice William J. Brennan, "it is not appropriate in choosing a Supreme Court justice to use any litmus test."

Bush emphasized repeatedly that he did not know — or ask — Souter's views on abortion. Appointing a new Supreme Court justice is "far broader than that. I have too much respect for the Supreme Court to look at one specific issue and one alone."

Some pro-lifers worry that Bush may have glossed over the abortion issue.

"The red flag went up when George Bush said there has been no litmus test," said Judie Brown, president of the American Life Lobby. "I don't know how many times Republicans think they can hoodwink pro-life people, but this is about the last straw."

Brown's group is circulating a petition questioning Souter's background. "We are officially withholding support until our questions are answered," said Robert Evangelisto, ALL press spokesman.

Pro-lifers cite three concerns about Souter.

The first is his vote with the majority of the New Hampshire Supreme Court to ac-

cept the concept of a "wrongful birth" of a child. In so doing, he and other judges ruled that doctors should test for birth defects and inform pregnant women of the results, allowing them to decide whether to abort deformed fetuses.

"When parents are denied the opportunity to make this decision" about giving birth to a deformed child "important personal interests may be impaired, including ... personal autonomy, which may include the making of informed reproductive choices," the New Hampshire court said.

In a concurring opinion, Souter discussed the hypothetical plight of an anti-abortion physician whose pregnant patient is carrying a deformed fetus and might want an abortion.

A "timely disclosure of (the physician's) professional limits based on religious or moral scruples, combined with timely referral to other physicians who are not so constrained, is a question open for consideration in any case in which it may be raised," he wrote.

One case now awaiting Supreme Court action involves rules preventing doctors at federally funded family planning clinics from providing abortion counseling or referrals to pregnant patients. Right-to-life forces vociferously oppose such referrals.

Souter is also drawing attention because of a 1981 letter he wrote at the behest of New Hampshire judges. The letter discussed judges' reactions to proposed state legislation demanding parental consent to a teenager's abortion, unless the minor had obtained a judge's approval.

Souter wrote that the judges objected because the legislation would allow society "to leave it to individual justices of this court to make fundamental moral decisions about the interests of other people" without any standards to guide them.

He said some judges believe abortion under such circumstances would be moral-



AP/Wide World Photos  
Supreme Court nominee David Souter, right, talks to Vice President Dan Quayle during a July 27 visit to the White House.

ly wrong while other judges believe they could not make such a decision for another person. The measure, he said, also would encourage "shopping for judges," producing inconsistency.

Souter's involvement as a member of the boards of two New Hampshire hospitals providing abortions also is being scrutinized. Former colleagues at the facilities say they do not remember that Souter ever suggested abortion is wrong.

While associated with the hospitals, "did he ever do anything to stop the slaughter," Brown asked. "If not, why?"

As a hospital board member, "Souter's role in these pro-abortion policies remains unclear," the National Right to Life Committee said July 26.

The National Right to Life Committee also disagreed with the decision in the "wrongful birth" case.

Yet, the group added, the ruling "reveals nothing regarding Judge Souter's views on whether *Roe vs. Wade* is a correct interpretation of the Constitution." Simi-

larly, his letter opposing a judicial role in teenagers' abortions "reveals nothing regarding Judge Souter's views on *Roe vs. Wade* or ... abortion or the legality of abortion."

Joseph M. Scheidler, president of the Chicago-based Pro-Life Action League, said a judicial nominee's abortion position "should be a litmus test." But that doesn't mean Bush needed to make the litmus test public, he added.

"I think Bush knows exactly where Souter stands on abortion," Scheidler said. "I think it's smart" of the president to downplay the issue, he added. "I don't want it to be public."

Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice, agreed that Bush knows Souter's views on abortion.

"I don't believe it was not a litmus test for Bush, no matter what he says," Kissling remarked. But once Souter's judicial philosophies were apparent, for Bush "it was real easy not to have to ask" specifically about abortion, she said.

## Muslim rebels seize hostages during attempted coup in Trinidad

PORT-OF-SPAIN, Trinidad (CNS) — Trinidad's Catholic archbishop was involved in the early stages of negotiations with Muslim rebels holding the island-state's prime minister and other high-ranking hostages after a July 27 coup attempt.

Archbishop Gordon A. Pantin, 60, of Port-of-Spain, was quoted on July 29 as saying rebel leader Yasin Abu Bakr had told him Prime Minister Arthur N.R. Robinson and the other hostages had been wired with explosives and would be blown up if any attempt was made to free them.

"He (Abu Bakr) said he has them wired up," Archbishop Pantin said in a radio interview after meeting with the rebel chieftain.

The archbishop called the situation "grim" and said Abu Bakr and his followers of the Jamaat Al Muslimee group

appeared to be losing patience.

As of early July 30, Archbishop Pantin and Anglican Bishop Clive Abdullah of Trinidad were reportedly no longer directly involved in the hostage talks. No explanation was given.

An Anglican priest, Father Nollie Clarke, was said to be participating in ongoing efforts at negotiation.

The Caribbean News Agency on July 29 quoted a top police official as saying Abu Bakr wanted an aircraft and safe passage to Libya. Trinidad government officials have accused Libya of being behind the coup attempt.

But a rebel spokesman said on the radio: "We are not interested in going to Libya. We are Trinidadians."

The same day, artillery fire erupted near a state-run television station seized by the

Muslim rebels and thick clouds of black smoke poured into the sky over the capital, witnesses said.

Abu Bakr was last reported near the television station.

On July 30, sustained automatic weapons fire was reported near the station and the Parliament building.

Radio Trinidad broadcast appeals urging people at the television station to call them to tell them what was happening.

Witnesses said the automatic weapons fire was the most sustained since the coup try was launched.

The heavy fire came after a spokesman for the rebel group denied that negotiations between the insurgents and the government were stalemated.

Trinidad's government extended a curfew from 12 to 18 hours a day and

ordered banks to stay closed.

A senior official at Port-of-Spain's main hospital said at least 300 people were wounded in the chaos following the coup.

The official confirmed two deaths, although the Caribbean News Agency has reported at least 22 people have been killed.

Although the rebel group has claimed that Robinson — who was shot in the leg during the takeover — had agreed to resign, it appeared that the talks were stalemated.

The rebel group has said it acted because the government's economic austerity measures were causing too much suffering.

Trinidad and Tobago, a twin-island, multiracial republic, has been hit hard by a fall in the price of oil, and unemployment has jumped above 20 percent.



AP/Wide World Photos  
Bishop George Carey (center), named the next Archbishop of Canterbury, with his wife Eileen and the current archbishop, Dr. Robert Runcie.

## Archbishop appointed to head Anglicans

LONDON (CNS) — Anglicanism's newly appointed spiritual leader favors furthering ecumenical links with the Catholic Church and shares Pope John Paul II's sense of mission toward the environment.

But he also plans to lead the Church of England toward ordaining women.

The new archbishop of Canterbury, 54-year-old Bishop George Carey of Bath and Wells, England, is to succeed Archbishop Robert Runcie early next year as head of the world's nearly 70 million Anglicans. The announcement of his appointment was made July 25 by the office of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. An announcement of Archbishop Runcie's replacement had not been expected until September.

Reaction from British Catholic leaders was positive.

Cardinal George Basil Hume of Westminster, England, said, "I look for-

ward to a continuation of the excellent working relationship which I have enjoyed with (Archbishop) Runcie."

Bishop Cormac Murphy-O'Connor of Arundel and Brighton, co-chairman of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, called Bishop Carey "a man of ecumenical vision."

Archbishop Runcie made a surprise announcement last April that he would step down at the end of January 1991.

At a press conference on the day his appointment was made public, Bishop Carey told reporters that he was ready to back women's ordination, despite opposition.

"The ordination of women is obviously one thing that I hope we will settle as a church," the bishop said. "I have always been a supporter of the ordination of women to the priesthood. I am well aware

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