

Protesting euthanasia



AP/Wide World Photos
Protesters Dec. 8 hold signs on the Capitol steps in Salem, Oregon, as members of Oregon Nurses for Life and Health protest assisted suicide. Measure 16, which passed by a narrow margin in last November's election and would have gone into effect Dec. 8, was put on hold after a federal judge granted a temporary restraining order blocking the law until at least Dec. 18.

Surgeon general's critics hail her resignation, await new appointee

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The Dec. 9 resignation of Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders was welcomed by critics of her outspoken views about sex education and the use of condoms, church teachings about homosexuality and other issues.

President Clinton said Elders' "public statements reflecting differences with administration policy and my own convictions" led him to ask for her resignation. The White House said Dec. 9 that Elders made one too many statements with which Clinton disagreed.

"I'm delighted," said William Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. "I just hope this is an opening to get someone who more closely represents the will of the people and does not have animus toward the Catholic Church."

"It is my hope that the dismissal of Surgeon General Elders will clear the way for leadership in the area of public health that respects the values of the vast majority of Americans and recognizes the fundamental importance of the family for the well-being of society," said Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington, who also had criticized her.

Elders was criticized by Catholic leaders for her comments about churches, which opposed some of her ideas. In letters to Clinton earlier in 1994, Cardinal Hickey asked him to disavow statements Elders had made about homosexuals, religion and traditional families.

"I hope you will agree that in our system of government it is highly inappropriate for civil officials — at the federal, state or local level — to attack any specific religion or to single out for ridicule the views of any religious group," said Cardinal Hickey's May letter to Clinton.

Elders criticized churches for their opposition to promoting use of condoms and for their stance on educating about sex and AIDS. At a speech in June to the Lesbian and Gay Health Conference, she referred to the "un-Christian religious right" and attacked its opposition to sex education programs.

"We've got to be strong to take on people who are selling our children out in the name of religion," she said.

According to White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta, the statement that finally pushed Clinton to ask Elders to

resign was her suggestion that school sex-education classes teach about masturbation.

"The president thinks this is not something schools should do," Panetta said. She made the comment following a speech at the United Nations Dec. 1 for World AIDS Day, according to *U.S. News and World Report*. The White House learned of her remarks Dec. 8.

Donohue said the Catholic League warned that Elders was a poor choice for surgeon general from the beginning, saying she had a record of anti-Catholic bigotry, in addition to unconventional views about sex education, teen sexuality and other issues.

A June 24 letter from 87 House Republicans called for her to be removed because of her views.

Among statements for which Elders was criticized were her comments that abortion opponents "love little babies as long as they are in someone else's uterus" and that they need to get over their "love affair with the fetus."

In an interview broadcast Dec. 11 on NBC's "Meet the Press," she reiterated several of the statements that got her into trouble, including the comment that the anti-abortion movement "was being run primarily by ... male positions, by a celibate, male-dominated church," a reference to the Catholic Church.

"I felt that I was talking to women and I felt that they should really stand up and fight for their right to choice," she said of the remark.

"We won't miss Dr. Elders' offensive attacks on the millions of Americans who believe that unborn children deserve legal protection," said a statement from Wanda Franz, president of the National Right to Life Committee. "But we don't deceive ourselves into thinking that today's firing indicates any change in President Clinton's support for federal promotion of abortion on demand."

The Family Research Council called the firing a consequence of the November elections, in which a majority of Republicans were elected to Congress for the first time in 40 years.

"The Clinton administration is mistaken if they believe that changing the window dressing will make their radically anti-family proposals any more acceptable to the American people," said the statement from the research council's president, Gary L. Bauer.

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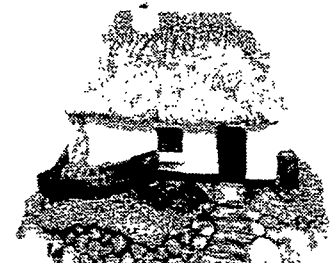
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