

Abortion foes rally to fight Foster's confirmation

Decry record, medical ethics

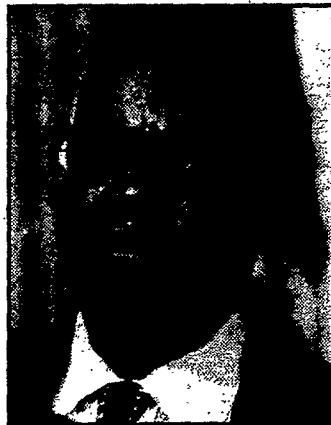
By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The day before Senate confirmation hearings opened on surgeon general nominee Dr. Henry Foster, a dozen organizations that oppose abortion denounced him as "a repackaged Joycelyn Elders" whose record raises doubts about his medical

ethics.

The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee was to begin the hearings May 2.

An obstetrician-gynecologist from Tennessee, Foster has been criticized for performing abortions; for supporting the controversial Tuskegee Study on the effects of syphilis on black men from whom treatment was withheld; for supporting involuntary ster-



Reuters/RNS
Dr. Henry Foster

ilization of mentally handicapped women; and for an apparent lack of emphasis on abstinence in the "I Have A Future" program he created to fight teen pregnancy in Nashville housing projects.

"We know a repackaged Joycelyn Elders when we see one," said Edmund Peterson, chairman of an African-American organization called Project 21, at a May 1 press confer-

ence.

Elders was forced to resign as surgeon general after a controversial, volatile tenure during which she antagonized abortion opponents and religious leaders with her statements on sex education, abortion, homosexuality and teaching school children about masturbation.

Several speakers at the press conference noted that according to numerous reports and a laudatory profile in that day's *Washington Post*, Foster is a personable, likeable gentleman.

"But the issue is not Dr. Foster's likableness," said Kristi Hamrick, legislative director of the Family Research Council. "It is his policies and his pursuit of them. Dr. Foster has been on the ragged edge of experimentation and nouveau policy during the course of his career."

Hamrick said Foster's participation in the Tuskegee Study and his efforts to break down restrictions on abortion contribute to the question "What is Dr. Foster's criteria for protecting human life — our lives, if he takes national office?"

Douglas Johnson, legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee, said any senator would be justified in opposing Foster's nomination on the basis of three issues: Foster's opposition to regulating abortions, including parental consent laws; his support for abortion as a form of birth control, illustrated by his participation in experiments with a do-it-yourself abortion drug; and his responses to questions about his involvement with abortion practices.

Johnson also took issue with the complaint by leaders of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League and Planned Parenthood that Foster opponents were making a "litmus test" out of the fact that he had performed abortions.

Johnson quoted from a February press conference attended by Kate Michelman and Pam Maraldo, respective presidents of those organizations, at which both said they would oppose the nomination of any obstetrician-gynecologist who refused to perform abortions.

"I find it ironic that the pro-abortion advocacy groups that put his name in nomination now are accusing us of having a litmus test," said Johnson, noting that some physicians who once performed abortions are now active in opposing it.

Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, R-Kan., has said that even if the labor committee should approve Foster's nomination, he might kill the nomination by not calling the matter up for a vote by the full Senate.

Dole's fellow Kansan, Republican Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, chairs the committee. Her public position on Foster was neutral going into the hearings. A supporter of legal abortion, Kassebaum has said she wants to conduct the hearings in a manner that protects the credibility of both the Senate and Foster.

Also at the press conference to voice their opposition to Foster for many of the same reasons cited by Johnson and Hamrick were speakers from Concerned Women for America, the American Family Association, the Christian Coalition, the African-American Life Alliance, the Life Education and Research Network, and the Traditional Values Coalition.

Shortly before the press conference began, Vice President Al Gore greeted teenagers from the "I Have a Future" program on the steps of the Capitol as part of White House efforts to support Foster. Later in the day, President Clinton described Foster as "a pro-life, pro-choice doctor who deserves to be confirmed as surgeon general."

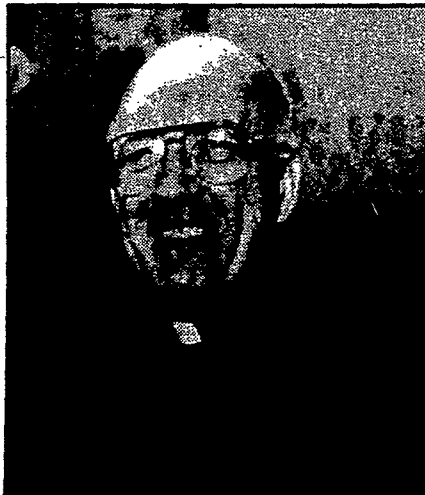
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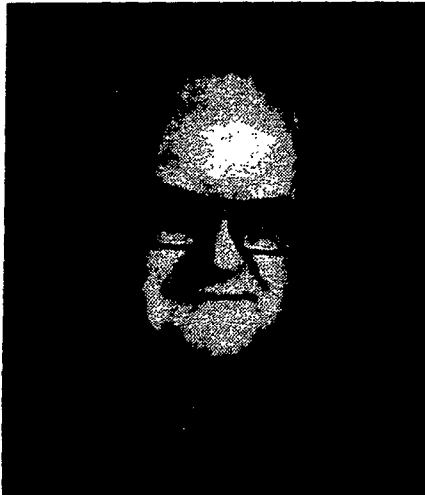
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