

Elders wins Surgeon General bid; Catholic League scores points, wins friends

President Clinton couldn't afford to see another nominee shot down in flames, so careful maneuvering, parliamentary procedure and a great deal of political capital were utilized in order to win Senate confirmation for controversial Surgeon General nominee Dr. Joycelyn Elders.

Letters of "apology" from both Dr. Elders and President Clinton addressed to NCCB chair Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore were released just days before the Senate vote in an attempt to appease Catholics but critics, including the Catholic League, were quick to point out the inadequacy of the so-called apology and its politically motivated timing.

In a press conference called by the Catholic League on September 7, the day of the Senate vote, Dr. Patrick Riley noted, "All she said was 'Well, if you're offended, I'm sorry.' She doesn't withdraw what she said. It's hardly an adequate apology."

James A. Smith, government relations director for the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission called the apology to I Keeler "half hearted" and went on to point out that there had been no apology offered to evangelicals and other Christians who had also been vilified by the acid-tongued Elders.

The Catholic League statement opposing Elders' confirmation was co-signed by Smith, representing the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as by representatives of Catholic War Veterans, the American Family Association and Eagle Forum.

Brian T. Olszewski, editor of the lively *Northwest Indiana*

Catholic offered a tongue-in-cheek editorial comment: "Do you think the president called her and said, 'Look, Joycelyn, I know you don't like Catholics but I'm going to need them again in '96, so could you at least apologize.' He does, she did, and now the Senate will confirm her appointment."

Knights of Columbus spokesman Russell Shaw, a member of the Catholic League national board, told Catholic News Service that her response was not "altogether satisfactory."

Bishop James T. McHugh of Camden, chair of the bishops' pro-life committee acknowledged her apology but went on to question her public stands and aggressive pursuit of issues with which the church cannot possibly agree.

Boston's *Pilot* editorialized, "She never apologized for what she said. She merely regretted that you and I took offense." In his weekly column in the *Pilot*, Cardinal Bernard Law lashed out at the anti-Catholic and anti-religious bias in American culture today (story below).

Carroll Quinn, president of the National Council of Catholic Women summed up the feelings of many when she said that Elders' apology "does not end our concern over the willingness of a government nominee to make anti-Catholic statements in the first place."