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July 27, 1993

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Nominee fends off critics,  
offers health-care vision

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Surgeon General nominee Joycelyn Elders said she wants to change the way Americans think about health, and she wants to be "the voice and the vision for the poor and the powerless."

Elders, pediatric endocrinologist and former director of the Arkansas Department of Health, defended her record July 23 before the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee after a month of criticism by the Religious Right. The committee's vote on the nomination is expected July 30.

Elders fended off charges of financial misconduct and discussed her controversial views on sex education during the four-hour hearing.

"I appear before you today at a time when our entire nation is facing great challenges in public health . . .," she said. "I believe the only way to heal our nation is through prevention. Prevention requires education.

"If confirmed, I would make my utmost goal the education of our people, all our people, on how to stay healthy."

In her opening statement, Elders told the committee about some of her personal and professional challenges. The oldest of eight children, Elders did not see a doctor until her first year of college.

"I have heard my mother scream during difficult child deliveries, without any medical help," she said with a trembling voice.

She recounted one of her earliest memories about the lack of health care. Her 4-year-old brother's appendix burst, and he was taken on a mule to the nearest doctor, who was 10 miles away. After his abdomen was lanced, he was sent home.

"I have seen bright young people all over this country in an ocean surrounded by the sharks of drugs, alcohol, violence, homicide, suicide, AIDS and teenage pregnancy, while we argue over whose values we are going to teach," she said, once again fighting back emotion.

Despite virtual unanimous support from the medical community, Elders' nomination has been challenged by Religious Right groups who say her views on sex education promote promiscuity.

Responding to a question regarding school-based sex education, Elders

said that America's health-care system needs to start preventing problems rather than just fixing them.

Her critics believe sex education for teens belongs in the home or at church, not in school, she said, but many of the nation's children do not attend church or have stable family environments. The school is the only place where all children are, and it is cost-effective and age-appropriate education, she said.

The school-based approach must be reinforced by the church and community, she added.

If Americans teach their children drivers' education, not to drink and drive and to wear their seat belts, they cannot fail to teach them about sexuality, she said.

"I would like to make every child born in America a planned, wanted child," she said.

"I believe in abstinence as much as anybody. ... We know that our children are not being abstinent. ... I am not about just passing out condoms. I am about preventing unplanned pregnancies.

"If we prevent the pregnancy, abortion becomes a non-issue."

Elders said she views teen pregnancy and abortion as tragedies in American life. "If we stop talking about abortion and focus our attention on stopping teen pregnancy, we will make real progress."

Sen. Dan Coats, R-Ind., asked Elders several questions about financial issues, particularly unpaid Social Security taxes for a nurse who cared for her mother-in-law. Elders said those previously unpaid taxes have been paid and that her husband was responsible for his mother's day-to-day concerns.

The hearings began with partisan bickering. Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla., objected to the committee meeting two hours after the full Senate was in session. Committees meet while the full chamber is in session as a standard practice, but Senate rules allow any senator to object to committees meeting two hours after the full body has convened.

Nickles, who is not on the committee, said he wanted more time to examine Elders' record. The hearings already had been delayed one week because of the controversy surrounding the nomination.

Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass. and committee chairman, said he would be no part of another prolonged delay and told committee members that they would reconvene as soon as the Senate recessed that afternoon. Kennedy said such political maneuvering brought shame to the Senate by members of the Republican Party. He excluded ranking minority committee member Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, R-Kan., whom Kennedy said had been cooperative.

Coats said he resented the chairman's accusation that the Republicans -- except Kassebaum -- were trying to "trash" Elders' nomination. He blamed the media, not Republicans, for the controversy surrounding Elders.

Following several exchanges between the two senators, Sen. Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., asked the committee to proceed and, for once, to treat women who come before Senate committees with some respect; the room erupted with applause.

Among the critics of Elders' nomination are leaders of the Christian Life Commission, the Southern Baptist Convention's moral-concerns agency. The SBC in recent years has repeatedly opposed government support of abortion.

"I think this (would be) an extraordinarily bad appointment that will mean bad policy," the CLC's James Smith told Associated Baptist Press after the hearing.

"She represents everything that is wrong with federal policy on sex education and abortion," said Smith, CLC director of government relations. "As a result, things will only get worse under her administration as surgeon general."

Some statements in Elders' past indicate "she holds pro-life Americans in contempt," Smith said. "In some respects she is an anti-Christian religious bigot."

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-- By Pam Parry and Greg Warner

Emphasis on abstinence  
earns support, cautions

By Mark Baggett

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- "I'm not an ice queen. I'm human like everyone else," says Amie Beth Dickinson, the fourth runner-up in the Miss Alabama pageant, discussing her commitment to sexual abstinence.

"It doesn't mean I'm not tempted. It doesn't mean I'm not attracted to guys. But they know I'll never pressure them into any situation."

Dickinson, 20, a senior at Samford University, a Baptist school in Birmingham, Ala., is one of a number of young people who have made a public commitment to abstinence.

Recently many Southern Baptist youth across the country likewise have made vows of abstinence in youth rallies and church services as part of a national campaign sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. The program, called "True Love Waits," has attracted national attention.

Though not a part of the program, Dickinson supports the choice of abstinence. She explained her personal reasons for taking a stand:

"I'm adopted. And adoption is often the last option in a series of decisions young girls make about their lives. My biological mother was 17 years old, scared and alone, pregnant and unmarried. Don't get me wrong. I'm very grateful to be here. I'm grateful she chose adoption. But because of that, I'll never know her."

Dickinson, a public relations major at Samford, said she decided to speak out after seeing the pressures of the sexual revolution on her peers. She said she has never had a negative reaction to her platform.

"People are skeptical at first," she said. "Why would a 20-year-old talk about abstinence? When I speak to inner-city groups, I tell them I know where they are coming from. My mom was 17 when she had me."

"To middle-class groups, I'm not threatening because I'm one of them. ... Not everybody has heard that side, that it's OK to wait. I've spoken at Auburn University, and people were coming up afterwards saying they were glad I said what I said."

One of the lessons of the trend toward abstinence is that Southern Baptists can't assume their children are immune from sexual activity, said Samford professor Lane Powell.

Powell, chair of the family and consumer education department at Samford and an author of books on teenage sexuality, said studies have shown the level of sexual activity at Southern Baptist colleges is almost the same as in the general population.

"In doing seminars for Southern Baptists, I never assume the young people there are abstinent," Powell said. "I do think that a strong religious commitment encourages a delay in sexual activity and that a sizable group chooses to be abstinent."

"But my experience with kids is that no one really prepares them for the intensity of emotions that occur when they get involved in a close romantic

relationship. Yes, you really mean it when you take a vow of abstinence, but you may get in a situation where your hormones take over."

Powell supports the "True Love Waits" program because it sends a positive message and encourages self-discipline, and also because the taking of vows is a long-standing practice of the Christian church.

But Powell worries about those teens who can't keep the pledge, she said. They may become doubly guilty and more self-deprecating, an image that could affect their future relationships.

"I hope we can add an element of grace and of realism," she said. "Sexual decision-making is not all physical. There is a big emotional component. Teens so much want to be accepted by their peers, and kids who have not had much affection or love at home want acceptance even more."

Powell also hopes the vows of abstinence will not remove parents and churches from their roles in sex education. She discusses those roles in a six-part videotape series that features her and her family called "Generation to Generation: Teaching Christian Values about Sexuality in the Home and Church," which is available from the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"One precaution is that we cannot assume that we don't need to explain birth control and how the act of conception takes place," she said, adding that sex educators have long taught the virtues of abstinence as part of a broader program.

"Church-related young people are less likely to use contraceptives when they become sexually active," she warned. "If we concentrate only on abstinence, we leave them in ignorance, and we leave them to be vulnerable."

For young people bombarded by images of sexuality on television, the commitment to abstinence must be reinforced often, said Amie Beth Dickinson.

"I still feel the pressure for girls to be skinny and perfect and for guys to be attracted to you," she said, "But you have to have a balance. To too many people appearance is everything. I may spend an hour working out, but I don't devote all my time to how I look. On TV, the message is the opposite."

Making a vow of abstinence is not without its consequences, however. She broke up with a boyfriend of two years, partially over her commitment. Since then, however, she's had plenty of different dates, she said. "I'm the safest girl any guy could go out with," she explained.

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CBF takes in \$5.7 million  
in first half of 1993

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship received almost \$5.7 million in contributions during the first half of 1993, a 72 percent increase over the same period last year.

The pace of giving for 1993 likely will mean the Fellowship will reach its goal of \$10 million by the end of the year and could approach \$12 million. Last year the organization of Baptist moderates took in \$7.3 million -- \$3.3 million by the halfway point.

In June 1993 -- the latest period for which statistics are available -- the Fellowship received \$827,136 in contributions from churches and individuals. That total is a 63 percent increase over June 1992.

Gifts to the Fellowship topped \$1 million during each of the first three months of 1993, spurred by giving to the Fellowship's global missions offering. Giving dipped below the million-dollar mark for the next three

months but still maintained the steady growth over the previous year.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was established in 1990 by Southern Baptist moderates displeased with the current leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention and its agencies.

The Fellowship's three funding plans allow churches and individuals to bypass the Cooperative Program, the SBC funding plan, and to withhold funds from Southern Baptist agencies of which they disapprove.

Gifts to the Fellowship support a variety of Fellowship mission ventures, as well as Fellowship-endorsed agencies and organizations. Critics within the SBC, however, say the Fellowship's growth is coming at the expense of SBC programs.

So far in 1993, the Fellowship's contributors have continued the trend of directing more money away from traditional SBC causes and toward the Fellowship's own efforts.

In 1991, 75 percent of contributions were designated for traditional SBC causes, such as Southern Baptist agencies and state conventions. That percentage fell to 56 percent in 1992 and to 34 percent to date this year.

Meanwhile, 58 percent of contributions this year have been targeted for the Fellowship's own programs, such as the organization's missions venture. An additional 8 percent went to independent organizations and agencies supported by the Fellowship.

Cecil Sherman, coordinator of the Atlanta-based Fellowship, said he is delighted with the mid-year financial report. "I think it is an indicator of the dynamic energy that is driving this movement of Baptist Christians," he said.

"The fact that the portion of overall contributions being directed to CBF causes continues to grow each month demonstrates again that Baptists of conviction and conscience are finding a home in the Fellowship and a viable means for supporting global missions and other ministries that seek to be true to the Baptist understanding of the gospel."

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-- By Greg Warner

Another parochial-school aid  
proposal headed for Congress

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A Texas congressman said he plans to introduce a measure that would allow public funds to go to private and religious schools -- an idea that repeatedly has been rejected by Congress.

Rep. Dick Armey, R-Texas, said he will offer a school-choice substitute to the administration's education-reform bill, expected to be considered in late July in the U.S. House of Representatives. Armey, who introduced a school-choice proposal last year on behalf of the Bush administration, said Clinton's proposal will "do absolutely nothing" for school reform.

Both education bills would provide \$400 million in federal matching grants for schools. However, Armey's measure requires 25 percent of federal funds be used for choice programs. His plan permits each community to define choice for itself -- whether or not it includes private and religious schools.

For decades Congress has rejected proposals to channel tax funds to religious schools, but in recent years, the battle has been waged under a new banner -- parents must have the financial means to make a choice in their children's education.

"The reason things don't change in Washington is because Congress has given the teachers' unions and the education bureaucracies a monopoly over American education," Armev said. "Busting up this monopoly would bring the greatest dispersal of monopoly power since the break up of AT&T."

The reason the liberals are scared of school choice is that they do not want to loosen their grip on the nation's children, he added.

The Clinton administration has opposed private school choice. The National Coalition for Public Education, representing more than 40 groups that includes the Baptist Joint Committee, has opposed federal funding of non-public schools.

Brent Walker, BJC associate general counsel, said the Armev substitute stands virtually no chance of passage in its present form. "Serious parochial-aid battles will be fought mainly at the state level," he said.

"The bill claims not to require private school choice, but the mere possibility that tax dollars will be funneled to sectarian organizations to teach religion is bad enough," Walker continued. "As a practical matter, since the bill requires 25 percent of the dollars to be spent for choice programs, there is a strong financial incentive to opt for choice."

This latest attempt to put "Caesar's money" in the pockets of churches would bring with it pervasive government regulation, Walker added.

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-- By Pam Parry

Senate committee adopts  
non-profit postal reform

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A Senate committee approved legislation July 22 that would reform how non-profit postal rates are calculated, adding stability to the rates while increasing them slightly over the next six years.

The Senate Appropriations Committee included the reform language in the Treasury, Postal Service and General Government Appropriations Bill (H.R. 2403). A similar measure was included as part of the Budget Reconciliation Bill (H.R. 2264). But supporters of the reform believe it might be cut from the budget bill, which is in conference committee.

The provision would assign non-profit mailers overhead costs equal to half of the corresponding commercial rate overhead, but the measure also stipulates that the rate increase would be phased in during a six-year period.

Previously, non-profit publications benefitted from a preferred rate that reflected only the cost of handling that class of mail. Congress had appropriated funds to the U.S. Postal Service for the non-profit mailers' share of overhead expenses.

In recent years, the postal subsidy has been reduced as government has attempted to cut spending. The compromise, drafted by Rep. William Clay, D-Mo., was drawn after the Clinton administration proposed 150 spending cuts that included funding for preferred postal rates.

While saving the government \$152 million over four years, it would have resulted in a 35 percent rate hike Oct. 3 for non-profit mailers.

The Clay compromise would mean a 12 percent increase -- about 2 percent annually for six years -- for second-class non-profit publications. Third-class non-profit publications would face a 23 percent hike -- about 4 percent each year.

The measure also would:

-- charge second-class non-profit publications the commercial rate if their advertising exceeds 10 percent;

-- bar non-profit mailers that have certain commercial dimensions from using the preferred rate.

A major difference in the Senate legislation is the reinstatement of the surcharge on third-class "flats," or non-letter-sized material, that the original measure would repeal.

Non-profit mailers will continue to have lower rates, with commercial mailers picking up the tab formerly paid by taxpayers.

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-- By Pam Parry

Action needed for refugees, women,  
human-rights conferees say

By Wendy Ryan

VIENNA, Austria (ABP) -- The United Nations should put new emphasis on violence against refugees and displaced peoples, religious freedom, and the dignity of women, according to an international group of religious leaders.

Three Baptist leaders were among the 12 representatives of international church and global ecumenical organizations who issued the plea during the World Conference on Human Rights June 14-25 in Vienna, Austria.

It was the first international conference on human rights in 25 years.

"These deep concerns grow out of a fidelity to Christ," the group wrote, "and out of the vast experience and advocacy of churches in their struggle against the effects and root causes of hunger, poverty and other human-rights violations."

The three Baptists were Knud Wümpelmann of Copenhagen, president of the Baptist World Alliance, Mary Kalil of El Salvador, BWA vice president, and Robert Frykholm of Austria, representative of the American Baptist Churches Board of International Ministries to Europe.

The document signed by the leaders described the concerns for refugees, religious freedom and women as "urgent."

The religious leaders called for "immediate action" to stop the "structural and societal violence being perpetrated against asylum-seekers, migrants, refugees and minorities."

Violence against refugees, as well as racist attacks and ethnic violence, are "a major threat to civil society," the leaders said. They called for "new approaches to overcome socio-economic barriers in a world where most states are multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-faith."

"No religious community should plead for its own religious liberty without active respect and reverence for the faith and basic human rights of others," the leaders said.

They described the exercise of religious freedom and tolerance as "inseparable from other fundamental human rights."

The human rights of women around the world was a major conference topic, and the religious leaders called for "a new understanding of human rights based on the awareness of the deep meaning of human community."

"We have heard of the systematic violence practiced against women . . .," the religious leaders said. "Women suffer the most in situations where they experience the brokenness of life and community."

"Arguments of culture, tradition, heritage and religion have often been

evoked to deny women a life of dignity," the religious leaders said. Churches, they said, have acknowledged "the rights of women are not sufficiently recognized."

In other Baptist participation at the human-rights conference, former U.S. president Jimmy Carter addressed the role of non-governmental organizations, like BWA, and called for a strong person in the United Nations to be responsible for human rights. This proposal was not accepted.

Carter also addressed the entire conference where, according to Wümpelmann, "he was applauded several times." He called the rich nations of the Northern Hemisphere "selfish" and called on them to become more generous.

Carter said there was no subject more critical than human rights. "That's on the cutting edge of development, peace and freedom," he said.

Wümpelmann and Kalil described the conference as "chaotic" because of differences of opinion between the North and the South over what constitutes human rights. The North places more emphasis on individual human rights and abhorrence of torture, and the South emphasizes freedom from poverty and the freedom to develop.

In their statement, the religious leaders called for a universal view of human rights, based on a deep respect for human dignity.

"Because the BWA has long been a strong advocate for religious freedom and human rights, we felt it was important to be represented and give our point of view at this conference," said Wümpelmann.

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-- Wendy Ryan is director of communications for the Baptist World Alliance.

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