

'I acted as a mother' // Baird explains hiring violation

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Body

A contrite Zoe **Baird** Tuesday told the Senate Judiciary Committee that she knowingly broke immigration laws in **hiring** two illegal immigrants as family servants.

"It was a **violation** of the law ... and **I** deeply regret it," said **Baird**, nominated to become the nation's first female attorney general.

Baird, 40, came under tough questioning from senators during the day-long hearing, but the Democrat-controlled panel still seemed inclined to vote for her confirmation. The hearing is set to continue Thursday.

Sen. Joseph Biden Jr., D-Del., the panel's chairman, said he was pleased that **Baird** admitted the **violation**.

But Biden disagreed with some observers who dismiss the issue's importance and instead contend "this is like a parking ticket."

"To **me** this is a big deal, personally, and **I** suspect it is to a lot of Americans," Biden said.

The controversy involves the **hiring** of a Peruvian couple by **Baird** and her husband, Yale law professor Paul Gewirtz, as a baby sitter and driver for about a two-year period beginning in 1990. **Baird** had to pay back Social Security taxes and \$ 2,900 in civil fines for **hiring** the couple.

Baird offered a forceful defense, though insisted she was not trying to excuse her conduct, only **explain** it.

Baird said she and her husband sought advice from a private lawyer about **hiring** the couple. The lawyer advised that employment of the immigrants was a "technical **violation**," but not one that appeared to be enforced by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, she said.

Maternal instincts about providing child care for her son, now 3, clouded her legal judgment, **Baird** said.

"Quite honestly, **I** was **acting** at that time really more as a **mother** than as someone who would be sitting here designated to be attorney general."

While the prospect of confirming a woman to serve as the nation's top law enforcement officer was at first greeted with excitement in Senate circles, reports about **Baird's** immigration problem have taken their toll. Several senators said that most phone calls from constituents about **Baird's** nomination were negative.

Two female newcomers to the previously all-male committee, Carol Moseley- Braun, D-Ill., and Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., likely will question **Baird** on Thursday.

Feinstein acknowledged that emotions are running high.

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"Everything in me as a woman, sitting in on this for the first time in history, would like to confirm a woman (for attorney general)," she said.

But Feinstein said there are "obviously complications."

Graphic

PHOTO, b/w, H. Darr Beiser, USA TODAY

CUTLINE: OVER, FOR NOW: Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D-Ohio, left, talks with Attorney General-designate Zoe Baird after her confirmation hearing Tuesday. The panel still seems inclined to confirm her.

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