

Looking for an Attorney General: The Reaction;

Women Are Frustrated By Failed Nominations

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Body

Women across the country yesterday **reacted** with immense **frustration** at what they perceived as a growing double standard for men and **women** being considered for the Clinton Cabinet.

Many said they understood and agreed with Mr. Clinton's decision to accept the withdrawal of his first nominee for **Attorney General**, Zoe Baird, after it was learned that she had broken the law by employing an illegal alien. But they said they were astounded that Kimba M. Wood, a strong candidate who had not violated the law, should also be forced out of competition because she once hired an illegal alien to care for her young son. That hiring was legal, since it occurred before immigration laws were tightened, and Judge Wood insisted in a statement Friday that she "fulfilled every legal requirement" regarding that employee.

"Kimba Wood got caught in the wave created by the Zoe Baird situation," said Susan Estrich, a law professor at the University of Southern California and an outspoken feminist. "I didn't have a lot of sympathy for Zoe Baird. She knowingly broke the law though she had the financial resources to do otherwise. But what is disconcerting here is that we seem to have created an atmosphere where someone who did not break the law is nonetheless barred from serving."

A Double Standard?

Although it was impossible yesterday to determine precisely how the majority of Americans felt about Judge Wood and her fate, it was clear that many **women** in and out of politics felt that the judge was being treated unfairly because of the President's political calculations, even though Mr. Clinton was seen as insistent that a **woman** be named to the post.

Abby Ginzberg, a lawyer at the American Bar Association's midwinter meeting in Boston, said she fears all female candidates will now be suspect. She said she had wholly supported Judge Wood's candidacy. "If she can't pass the test, nobody can."

Women's distress over the matter seemed to cross party lines. "I've been talking to friends of mine all day long," said Tanya Melich, a Republican political consultant, "and I don't think that there was one of them who thought she was treated fairly. I can only say it's more sexism. We have one standard for the boys and another for the girls."

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Many men, however, saw the issue instead as a case of political necessity. Several political strategists said the Baird case had so alarmed the White House that it could not afford a trace of repetition.

"The logical, rational argument is that these situations were entirely different," said William A. Carrick, a Democratic strategist who worked with Senator Dianne Feinstein's campaign in California. "But on a political level, I think it would have been almost impossible to differentiate."

Yet he may have been wrong. Joann Sanicola, a sales clerk who was shoveling snow outside the east Bronx jewelry store where she works, said she did not believe that Judge Wood's **nomination** should have been sidetracked. "She should have continued pursuit of the office," said Ms. Sanicola, who described herself as a member of the "overworked, hard-working, average middle-class." Ms. Sanicola said her own understanding was that "She was paying taxes. There was nothing that she did that was illegal."

It was precisely that point that so angered many professional **women** around the country. Scores stressed their **general** sense that **women** were being held to a higher standard than men in the appointment process and were subject to an additional layer of questioning that men have never had to endure.

"For every man who has ever been confirmed to a Cabinet position there has never been the notion of disclosure of his housekeeping arrangement, much less how much time he spent with his child," said Kathleen Brown, the treasurer of the State of California. "It has never been on anyone's mind. It just doesn't come up for male nominees to think about their pattern of child care as a matter for political disclosure or an F.B.I. search."

More Problems for Clinton

That is already changing. Sources within the Clinton Administration said Friday that Charles F. C. Ruff, one of two other potential nominees for **Attorney General**, was out of the running because of questions about whether he had employed an illegal alien. That seemed to mark the first time that the issue had been raised about a man.

Despite the apparent rejection of Mr. Ruff, many **women** hammered their contention that a potential cabinet appointee who was also a father is far less likely to stumble on the same minefield. Many said they were also angered that the White House had publicized what Clinton officials perceived as Judge Wood's second liability, that she had trained -- for five days two decades ago -- to work at a Playboy club in London while attending the London School of Economics. They said they were outraged by suggestions that that brief stint could have subjected her to ridicule.

Stressing that the work would have involved nothing illegal, they pointed out that **women** in the 1960's often had to take demeaning jobs to finance their higher education.

"How old is this **woman**?" asked Marika Caruana, 32, of Riverdale. "You're talking about something that was done 28 years ago? I think it's ridiculous."

'Brought It Upon Herself'

Gloria Steinem, who once worked as a Playboy bunny and has written of her experiences, said she believed some of the **reaction** to both candidates is simply a caustic backlash against powerful **women**. "Having been a bunny," she said, "I can tell you that it is incredibly hard work and very underpaid and very exploitative."

Men and **women** interviewed yesterday consistently saw the issue differently. At the entrance to the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan, a husband and wife fell into immediate disagreement when asked about the case. "I don't see a double standard," said a man who would not identify himself.

"That's because you're not a **woman**," his wife retorted. "If it were a man they never would have asked."

Not far away, Mike Benson, another museum visitor, disputed the notion of a double standard. "Zoe Baird brought it upon herself," he said. "If a male had done the same thing, they would have asked him the same questions."

Problems Facing Women

Representative Patricia Schroeder, a Colorado Democrat, said she empathized with women who had to juggle careers and family life. Noting that both Ms. Baird and Judge Wood had significant financial resources, Ms. Schroeder said their back-to-back withdrawals should clarify the need for better child care.

"We have a tremendous problem in this country," she said. "This shows how deeply we need the family leave act and other legislation."

That reaction was heard across the New York metropolitan area yesterday. At the Pretty Please Hair Salon in Riverdale, the Bronx, Ruth Hass, who manages a New York City tour guide agency, wondered: "Is it only the mother responsible for hiring an illegal alien? I have a feeling Clinton is not going to be able to get any Attorney General in this country who has young children, male or female, if that is the criteria."

In Manhattan, Felicity Frisbie, 41, a mother who was chasing her son around the dinosaur exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History, said: "This is a problem that society denies we have. There are women who need child care and there are immigrant women who need work."

Ann F. Lewis, a Democratic analyst, agreed. "If a car breaks down you have no trouble saying to your boss that you will be in late," Ms. Lewis said. "But if your child gets sick it is seen as a problem. In this society it is O.K. to worry about your car, but it is not O.K. to worry about your child."

By late yesterday afternoon, some groups were already preparing organized objections to the way the two candidates for Attorney General were treated.

In Memphis, where leaders of the National Organization for Women were holding a board meeting, they agreed to begin an orchestrated fax, telephone and mailgram campaign to highlight the different treatment during the confirmation process, said Patricia Ireland, the group's president. "What we want to know is what arrangements all the men in the cabinet have made for their child care," she said.

Some men couldn't have agreed more. "I'm pro-women's-lib," said Anthony Serrano, a taxi driver in New York. "I don't think this subject would have come up if it were men. There are guys sitting there with their butts in those chairs asking questions who don't know what's going on at home. Be honest, how many men that applied for this position have ever been asked this question."

Graphic

Photos: "Would Zoe Baird's husband have been allowed to be Attorney General?" said Ruth Hass, who manages a tour-guide agency in New York City. "The family hired the illegal alien. It wasn't just Zoe. She's just one of the parents. Is it only the mother responsible for hiring an illegal alien?" (Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times)

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