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Critics Assail Thomas' Role At The Eeoc He Wins Support Of Black Group, Nunn

By Christopher Scanlan, Inquirer Washington Bureau The Associated Press contributed to this article

POSTED: July 17, 1991

WASHINGTON — When he was chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Clarence Thomas was responsible for policies and actions that victimized older Americans, minorities and women, three congressional critics charged yesterday.

"Of all the millions of people in America, surely President Bush can find a qualified nominee (for the Supreme Court) who has not built a career by hurting individual Americans," said Rep. Barbara Boxer (D., Calif.), flanked at a midday news conference by Reps. Edward R. Roybal (D., Calif.), chairman of the House Select Committee on Aging, and John Lewis (D., Ga.), a member of the Congressional Black Caucus.

As part of a small but growing movement seeking to block Thomas' confirmation, the three Democrats vowed to organize grassroots lobbying efforts by the politically potent constituencies they said had suffered while Thomas was in charge of the anti-discrimination agency from 1982 until 1990.

The National Organization for Women, the Congressional Black Caucus and a

Hispanic group, the League of United Latin American Citizens, are already on record as opposing Thomas. Other civil rights groups, including the NAACP, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and the National Council of La Raza, representing 134 Hispanic groups, are still studying Thomas' record.

"I have heard the argument that Clarence Thomas won't forget from whence he has come and, therefore, he will be sensitive to the plight of the disadvantaged," Lewis said. "My response to that argument is, 'Look at his record. He has forgotten from whence he has come.' "

Thomas grew up as a member of a poor family in Georgia.

On a day he was criticized, Thomas also picked up the support of a powerful Democratic senator, Sam Nunn of Georgia. Moreover, a group of black Republicans, the Council of 100, announced its support for Thomas.

Milton Bins, its chairman, sought to counter opposition of the Congressional Black Caucus, which is made up of 25 House Democrats and only 1 Republican.

Bins said the attack by the caucus is "unfair, piling on" and distorts Thomas' record.

"It's not the whole story," he said. "The Congressional Black Caucus does not speak for all African Americans."

The three Democrats' central complaints - that the agency allowed more than 13,000 age-discrimination complaints to lapse and that it issued a pattern of decisions that favored employers in disputes over equal pay for women and pension benefits for older workers - were raised last year when the Senate confirmed Thomas to a federal appeals court seat.

Now, with the stakes much higher, Boxer said, "we're going to work for the good of our country to stop this nomination."

Later in the afternoon, Sen. John C. Danforth (R., Mo.) defended Thomas' EEOC record. He said he had met with a number of EEOC employees Monday who uniformly praised Thomas.

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"I was told that (the lapsed age-discrimination) cases amounted to about two- to three-tenths of 1 percent of the caseload and that they never would have been discovered but for the computer program installed by chairman Thomas," Danforth said.

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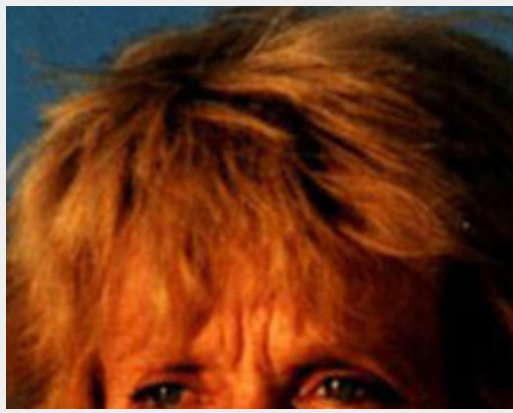
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