

Lindy Boggs ready to take up Vatican post

by Nina Ogden

Former U.S. Rep. Lindy Boggs (D-La.), whose nomination by President William Clinton to the post of ambassador to the Vatican is expected to be confirmed quickly by the U.S. Senate, will be the first American woman to serve as ambassador to the Holy See. Firsts are not unusual for the former congresswoman.

When the plane carrying her husband, House Majority Leader Hale Boggs, disappeared over Alaska in October 1972, Mrs. Boggs succeeded him, becoming the first woman to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives from Louisiana. She went on to serve nine terms as the U.S. Representative from her state's 2nd Congressional District. She was the first woman to chair a major political convention, when she served as chairperson of the Democratic National Convention in 1976. She was the first woman to serve as a Regent of the Smithsonian Institution. These are only a few of the items on

Congresswoman Boggs's long list of "firsts."

Corinne (Lindy) Claiborne Boggs was born and raised in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana. She attended a one-room grade school briefly, but was mainly tutored at home. There she began reading the Shakespeare plays in her family library, when her honorary Aunt Rowena paid her 25¢ for every book she read. She continued her education at St. Joseph's Academy in New Roads, Louisiana, graduating, as valedictorian, from the high school two months after her 15th birthday. She went on to graduate from Sophie Newcomb College at Tulane University. When she was in Congress, a reporter asked her what preparation she had received for political life. She replied that she had received perfect training for serving on the House Appropriations Committee, because she had been taught by the nuns that she was doing people a favor when she gave them the opportunity to contribute to a good cause.

Nine Congressional terms

Mrs. Boggs's assignments in her nine Congressional terms included the House Appropriations Committee and the Banking and Currency Committee. A subcommittee assignment on Energy and Water Development, as well as other scientific and technological matters within the purview of the Appropriations Committee, led her to develop a keen interest in scientific research and development. The 1988 dedication of the Lindy Claiborne Boggs Center for Energy and Biotechnology of Tulane University, where the former congresswoman also served as special counsel to the president, is an indication of her scientific interests. Lock and Dam Number One on the Red River Waterway, and the Lindy Claiborne Boggs Challenger Space Station and Mission Control Learning Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, are dedicated to her, as well.

Mrs. Boggs has long been a champion of the mission of the social encyclicals of the Catholic Church. In her Sept. 23 statement to the U.S. Senate on her nomination, she emphasized: "I have experienced service to refugees and to the ill, especially those in the new worldwide outbreak of leprosy, the poor and the hungry all over the world, with a special emphasis on the elderly and the displaced here in the United States."

Since the death of Princess Diana, Mrs. Boggs has spoken of some of that service in the charitable duties she shared with the Princess, raising funds for new medical protocols and equipment in the fight against cancer. She has spoken of her admiration, not only for Diana's ability to raise millions of dollars for these crucial needs, but also her ability to comfort the sick and dying, and her true interest in breakthroughs in medical science.

Lindy Boggs's children are the late Barbara Sigmund, former mayor of Princeton, New Jersey; Thomas Hale Boggs, a Washington, D.C. lawyer and lobbyist; and Cokie Roberts, journalist and commentator for National Public Radio and ABC News. Her son William died in infancy. She is the grand-

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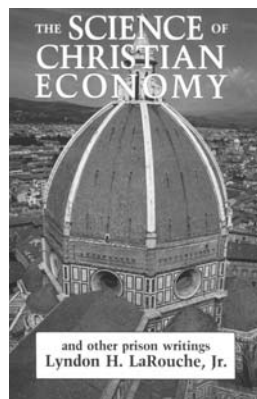
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President and Mrs. Clinton visit with Pope John Paul II at the residence of Archbishop McCarrick at Sacred Heart Cathedral. The President has nominated Lindy Boggs (above) to become the next U.S. ambassador to the Vatican.

mother of eight and the great-grandmother of six. Her dedication to her family as well as her service in Congress on the Select Committee on Youth and Families, where she chaired the Crisis Intervention Task Force, has also led to her efforts to protect children's health and education internationally.

'A distinguished choice'

Bishop Anthony M. Pilla, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, hailed President Clinton's nomination of Lindy Boggs as U.S. ambassador to the Holy See: "Mrs. Boggs is a well-informed and articulate person, known for her generosity of spirit and deeply committed to the service of others, especially those in need. She is a distinguished choice. Our prayers and well wishes will be with her as she begins her new assignment."

Lindy Boggs ended her statement before the Senate confirmation hearing on Sept. 23, saying: "Among the 168 countries represented at the Holy See are several which consider ambassadorial assignment there as the pinnacle of diplomatic service. Consequently, the American ambassador has access to some of the most seasoned diplomats in the world.

"My entire adult life, Mr. Chairman, has been engaged in service through the institution of Congress. I look forward to this new and exciting opportunity to further expressions of those goals."

Many of those who have known Lindy Boggs throughout

her years of service are echoing Bishop Pilla's evaluation that she is a "distinguished choice" for the Vatican post. Her interests in those things which the Pope is also devoted to—such as experiments in the natural sciences, dedication to children, both the unborn and those who are living precariously, and love of justice and peace—will make her welcome in the Vatican as well as the U.S. Embassy. John Paul, no doubt, will also welcome her experiences with, and love for, his friend Mother Teresa. Before Hale Boggs boarded the plane on his fatal flight over Alaska in 1972, the Majority Leader told his wife that he had just read a book by an extraordinary nun, who would appear at their parish church that evening, and encouraged her to attend Mother Teresa's talk in his absence. Mother Teresa had already left the Washington area when the news came of the missing airplane. She immediately called Mrs. Boggs and comforted her throughout the ordeal of the fruitless search and then through her bereavement.

We look forward to the indomitable Lindy Boggs's new assignment. We also look forward to the end of what can perhaps be called the "ageism" of the baby-boomer generation of journalists: Since the Honorable Corinne C. "Lindy" Boggs is one of the liveliest great-grandmothers on at least two continents, her example should immediately end the, heretofore endless, speculation that John Paul II is too old to continue to serve as Pope.