



The following letters were exchanged between Gregg L. Cunningham of the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform and C. Everett Koop, former surgeon general of the United States, in the days following President Clinton's address to a joint session of Congress on national health care reform. Koop, seated next to Hillary Clinton for the president's speech, had endorsed the plan at a White House breakfast two days earlier, saying, "President Clinton has already accomplished more in health care reform than all of his living predecessors combined." -Ed.

September 24, 1993

Dear Dr. Koop,

You and I first met in 1980 when you were Chief of Pediatric

Surgery at Philadelphia Children's Hospital and I was a young state legislator seeking your counsel as I drafted what was later to become the Pennsylvania Abortion Control Act. As you may recall that law went on to be litigated in the United States Supreme Court case of *Thornburgh v. American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology*. I remain grateful for your invaluable assistance during that meeting and the subsequent telephonic consultations you generously granted during the early days of your tenure as Surgeon General of the United States. I fondly recall the heady optimism with which many pro-life elected officials looked forward to a public health chief as willing as we to imperil his incumbency in defense of unborn life. I intend no disrespect but would be remiss were I not to note the extremity of the gulf between our hopes and your priorities. It now appears, however, that Mrs. Clinton may have granted you an extraordinary opportunity to reverse the widely held impression that your opposition to abortion is more personal than political. I pray you will not squander it.

My purpose in writing is to express my confusion regarding what seems to have been your decision to unqualifiedly associate yourself with the Clinton health care plan and by implication its avowed intent to provide abortion coverage. In a recent call to your office I was informed by a member of your staff that your role would be advisory in nature with your primary function as that of moderator between the administration and the medical profession.

I am dismayed that you would not have conditioned your willingness to facilitate development of this plan on President Clinton's willingness to abandon abortion coverage. I am even more disturbed that in no public statement of which I am aware have you condemned the abortion coverage provision or expressed any intention to seek its

removal. Whatever misgivings you may intend to express behind closed doors will be far less effective than your public expression of principled opposition. This is not an administration that responds as well to being shown the light as they do to being made to feel the heat.

Over the last several years, as I have debated the abortion issue across the nation, it has been my painful experience to have been repeatedly assaulted by abortion advocates who gleefully beat me over the head with your now infamous report to President Reagan discrediting clinical studies purporting to link abortion with adverse psychological reactions. No matter how well intentioned your analysis may have been I remain convinced that that report could have been drafted in a way that would have preserved your admirable commitment to intellectual honesty without doing such irreparable damage to our ability to establish an abortion-psychological complications connection--a nexus which you yourself later embraced at least at an anecdotal level. You now seem determined to create a sequel to that debacle. You may fancy yourself above the fray in the role of honest broker but your presence at Mrs. Clinton's side as her husband addressed a joint session of Congress on national television is being used powerfully by this administration to suggest your support for this plan's central features or, at worst, only tepid opposition. America needs advocates more than arbiters. Your vain attempt to find the safety of a fictional middle ground will provide aid and comfort to enemies of life and immeasurably increase the burden which must be borne by those who labor to detach baby killing from health care. The office of surgeon general has been described as a "bully pulpit" which I wish you would have used more forcefully in defense of life. Having now returned to a position of influence on the national health care scene, I implore you to disregard the disfavor of the

media and the disapproval of your professional colleagues and provide the leadership for which so many of us had hoped during the Reagan years. Get out there and give 'em heaven!

Respectfully, *Gregg L. Cunningham Executive
Director Center for Bio-Ethical Reform Anaheim, California*

Dear Mr. Cunningham:

It surprises me that you were once a state legislator and now purport to be the Executive Director of a center for bio-ethical reform, yet have so little understanding of what you write. You would do better if you refrain from trying to be eloquent in your rhetoric and just ask a simple question about something you apparently don't understand. My staff and my family have urged me not to answer your letter, feeling that the effort is really not worth it for someone so far off the truth in his assessment. I write only to say one thing. While Monday morning quarterbacks such as you stand on the sidelines and criticize others who are in the fray, let me say that I am responsible not to you but to my God for the way I act. Why do you judge what you think I do without knowing anything about it? It is not my desire to give you either assurances or comfort. But I would like to make clear that my association with the President and the First Lady and their health care reform package is to act as a moderator in a dialogue between the Administration and the medical profession. You are mean spirited, Mr. Cunningham, and you should be ashamed of your scholarship.

Sincerely yours, *C. Everett Koop, M.D. Bethesda, Maryland*

(Dictated by Dr. Koop but signed in his absence.)

[The following letter was not included in the article]

October 14, 1993

Dear Mr. Koop,

Your response to my letter regarding your responsibility as physician liaison for the Clinton pro-abortion health care plan contains four separate assertions that I don't "understand" your actions. You are correct.

You describe yourself as being "in the fray" concerning this debate but you go on to confirm that you have limited yourself to the role of mere "moderator" in a dialogue between the Administration and the medical profession. A "moderator" is a neutral arbiter who facilitates discussion while declining to take either side. A "moderator" is, by definition, above the "fray." To put the question "simply," why aren't you "in the fray," and why not as an advocate for the unborn?

You might think it impertinent to ask such a question when you have declared yourself answerable only to God. While it may be true that in your official capacities, neither you nor Mrs. Clinton are as fully accountable to the American people as would be healthy, you are surely not suggesting that your leadership role in public policy should be exempt from public scrutiny. Neither can you imagine that your leadership role in the Body of Christ should excuse you from the commandment contained in I Peter 5:5, "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility..."

In that latter connection you once co-authored a pro-life book for Christians entitled *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* You concluded by asking:

Will future generations look back and remember that...at least there was one group who stood consistently, whatever the price, for the value of the individual, thus passing on some hope to future generations? Or are we Christians going to be merely swept along with the trends -- our own moral values becoming increasingly befuddled, our own apathy reflecting the apathy of the world around us, our own inactivity sharing the inertia of the masses around us, our own leadership becoming soft?

That was a fair question for you to ask the church. Is it unfair for the church to ask the same question of you?

Regarding scrutiny of your leadership in public policy, the October 2, 1993 issue of World magazine published an article entitled "Whatever Happened to C. Everett Koop?" The author asked:

Has C. Everett Koop become to evangelical conservatives what Barry Goldwater is to secular conservatives? Goldwater won his Strange New Respect Award this summer for supporting President Clinton's gays-in-the-military gambit; Koop, the former surgeon general, won last week for endorsing Clinton's health plan, which includes abortion on demand as part of its basic "benefits" package. Strange New Respect is that which official Washington bestows on conservatives who "grow" during (or after) their experiences on the Potomac.

A few days ago radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh made the same point concerning your association with this pro-abortion proposal. Should everyone who dares ask these awkward but important questions be "ashamed?" Or would the real "shame" be in ignoring the fact that your involvement in this process could influence the safety of countless

innocent children?

Do you really believe that God wants you to help reform our health care system more deeply than He wants you to help stop the killing of our babies? Can you imagine a former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders submissively volunteering to shill for an abortion/ess health care package advanced by some future Republican administration? Is history going to record that President Clinton got a more forceful surgeon general than President Reagan?

If I were "mean-spirited," Dr. Koop, your picture would not still be hanging in my home. I placed it there thirteen years ago because I admired and respected the things for which you then stood. I am leaving it there to remind me to pray that you will become as strong a force for good as Dr. Elders has become for evil.

Your brother in Christ,

Gregg L. Cunningham Executive Director, Center for Bio-Ethical Reform