

Golf pro found O'Connor to be supremely qualified

WHEN PRESIDENT REAGAN nominated Judge Sandra O'Connor to become the first woman Supreme Court justice, Steve Dunning took it like the pro he is.

"I was teaching her according to a four-year plan, and we'd only completed two," he said. "As my pupil, I would have expected her to consult me about whether she should accept such a job. But, I guess, opportunities like this don't come along every day, do they?"

Dunning, a droll fellow of 34, is a golf instructor — and a good one — at the Glen View Club, an arboretum in Golf, Ill., which embraces some of God's greenest acres. This is one course so beautifully manicured that you hate to see anybody take a divot, and so classy that even the birds stop chirping when a member is about to putt.

During the winter, when even Glen View isn't playable, Dunning irons out slices in Arizona. Judge O'Connor works there, and Dunning was hired to tutor her when she chose to swing a 7-iron rather than a gavel.

"AN OUTSTANDING PERSON, in the top one per cent of the people I've ever taught," said Dunning, who despite his age, has been a golf guru for more than a decade. "Because of the demands on her time, she didn't have a lot of time to play, but she pretty much kept to a routine. She and her husband John would take a lesson from me every Saturday, then play nine holes, then come back and play 18 holes on Sunday. Last winter when I left there, I believe her handicap was in the low 20s. Not bad considering she only played 27 holes a week.

When O'Connor first took up the game at Paradise Valley, she was the student of an older professional. She soon expressed a desire to switch to Dunning, but balked,



Bob Verdi

"She was afraid she would offend the other gentleman," Dunning recalled. "That's the kind of lady she is. Then, this man, an English fellow, passed away, and she started taking lessons from me. She showed me a lot of character by doing that. Character is one of her great assets. Among her drawbacks, I would say, is her short game."

DUNNING WAS AWARE of the status O'Connor enjoyed in the community, but he treated her and her husband like he treats all hackers in quest of help.

"I call all my pupils mister and miss, but otherwise, I come down on them whenever necessary," Dunning said. "One day, both of them were on the practice tee with me. I said to him, 'Mr. O'Connor, if you continue to shift your weight like a double amputee, I'm gonna come over there and kick you in the fanny.' He looked at me and said, 'Steve, if you can talk to me in such familiar tones, it's about time for you to start calling me John and my wife Sandra.' I said OK. I don't know whether I could call Sandra that now since she's about to get into the Supreme Court. I'll have to talk to her about that."

"She is a very down-to-earth person, though. The way she carries herself, you'd be more surprised if she were a housewife than a judge, but I don't mean that in a bad way. You just know she's a very intelligent person doing something very important. You can tell that by the way she is during a lesson. She forces you to be a good teacher by asking good questions. She doesn't want to know simply that the left elbow should be where it is. She wants to know why. Very inquisitive, but very receptive, too.

"ONE OF THE FIRST LESSONS I had with her, and I must have had her for more than 30 in the last two years, I told her I didn't want her hitting the ball like a girl. That's a big obstacle for some ladies. They may not want to look like they're exerting themselves, may not want to ruffle their hair. But to hit a golf ball well, you can't be dainty. You gotta bleed from the gums a little bit. Sandra liked that when I said that. Now, she can hit a driver 180 to 200 yards. She's rangy, has good hand-eye coordination, and is serious about what she does.

"On the average, women make better students than men. That's one of the great parts about Glen View. We have a lot of fine women players who are excellent listeners and less inclined to tell you all they think they know about the golf swing, as some men might do. The women are out there to learn.

"If there's one criticism I would have about Sandra, it's that she's too what I call 'ballbound.' That is, too concerned about where the ball is going on the practice tee compared with what's happening to her swing. The ideal student is the one who listens and ignores where the ball goes. I may compliment Sandra on a swing, but she points to the fairway where the ball has only traveled 20 yards.

"I TELL HER I'M concerned about the swing, not the flight of the ball. That will come later. She understands, she says, but she adds, 'I want to go on record that I don't like it.' She's very bottom line and result oriented, but that's part of her success, I suppose. Sandra gets annoyed at bad shots, especially when they come a few in a row. She reacts quickly and unhappily, but she does not get embarrassed. She is not embarrassed. She just wants to find the solution. Judge O'Connor exhibited brassy loyalty when Dunning shifted from her country club outside Scottsdale to Mountain Shadows across the street. She followed her teacher to the rival course, and once invited him back over to his former grounds for an 18-hole lesson.

"We golfed, and then had lunch right in full view of the new pro at the place where I had once worked," Dunning said. "She didn't even blink. She's a strong woman, yet sensitive, and enjoys a sense of humor. A good pupil is one who also can relax while taking a lesson. I know she'll be great in Washington. She just might be the best golfer on the Supreme Court, and I wouldn't be surprised if someday she calls me from her chambers to ask me why she's having trouble with a wedge or something like that.

"Although, I guess I owe her a call. When I left her last winter, she told me to phone her as soon as I find the right girl. She doesn't think I should stay a bachelor, and she said that's one ceremony she'd like to handle. I don't know if that'll work anymore, either. Not too many golf pros who have been married in the Supreme Court of the United States. I'm happy for her, though. She'll have to make some sacrifices now. I just hope one of them isn't her golf game."

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O'Connor choice new double standard



Kevin Phillips
Syndicated Columnist

WASHINGTON — Two things strike me about the Sandra O'Connor nomination: the slipshod nature of White House preparation for coping with a breach of the 1980 Republican platform commitment to select judicial nominees on abortion-linked criteria (the breach itself was probably inevitable); and the new male-female double standard that has been applied in the O'Connor selection process.

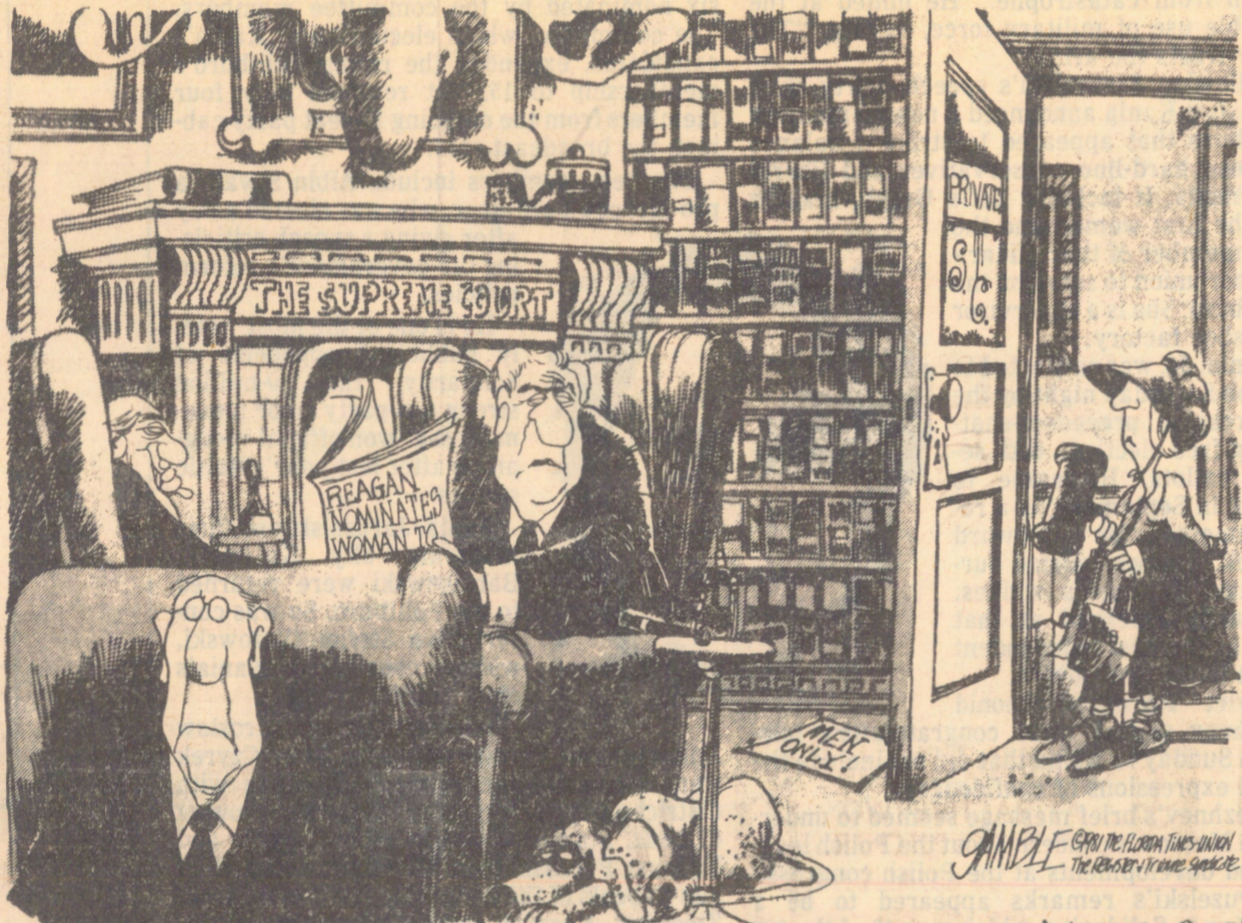
Point one is Machiavellian. There are well-positioned people in the administration, mostly former George Bush campaign aides, who dote on seeing President Reagan sour his relations with the right-to-life crowd. The more they can widen the breach, the less influence the new right and right-to-lifers will have in the future to block a future Bush presidential nomination.

Point two hasn't received enough attention. The old male-female double standard is that a woman couldn't be nominated for the U.S. Supreme Court. That's gone, of course. The new double standard is that when a woman is nominated, she doesn't have to meet the same standards of prior experience or undergo the same clearance procedures that a man would. Mrs. O'Connor has been chosen for the court under circumstances, and with a lack of American Bar Association scrutiny, that would have been precarious to a male.

Let me be specific. For the first time since 1952, a president of the United States failed to ask the American Bar Association for an evaluation of a nominee before making the announcement.

In part, that was almost certainly because Mrs. O'Connor, while qualified, was clearly not the most qualified candidate available. She was picked because she was a woman.

Judge O'Connor, it turns out, had a total of six years judicial experience.



"LADIES RESTROOM? SURE, MRS. O'CONNOR... GO OUT THE FRONT DOOR, TAKE A RIGHT AND IT'S ABOUT TWO BLOCKS."

First, she was GOP state legislator. Then, for some four years, she was a superior court judge. Then, in 1980, she moved up to the Arizona Court of Appeals, the state's second highest court. She dealt mainly with routine matters, such as workmen's compensation and divorce. That's not the stuff of which most U.S. Supreme Court cases are made.

I myself am not at all inclined to buy the argument that we need a court composed of the greatest and most experienced judicial minds in the country; we might well do better with grass roots common sense. But for those who marinate themselves in

the spirit of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Learned Hand et al, the rule is that presidents should not nominate obscure judges from obscure courts.

Just imagine what would have happened if President Reagan had reached into a middle-ranking Sun Belt state court to pick a former male Republican politician who happened to be a staunch conservative on the abortion and ERA issues. And just suppose he had picked such a man without clearing the nomination through the American Bar Association! The ruckus would have been enormous; any conceivable conflict of interest, however petty, would have

been trumped up and fed into the mass media's machine gun belt.

Judge O'Connor, instead, is getting a gusher of praise and oohing-and-aahing about how qualified she is and what a nice person she is. If she was a new right sympathizer, of course, the tenor would be noticeably different. But most of all, Sandra O'Connor is getting special preference and special treatment because she's a woman. Bias is always in vogue; it's only the direction and intensity that varies.

I sincerely hope all the sexual equality zealots in the women's movement understand that.

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up front
by Ed Foster
Times Columnist

So much euphoria reigns over the nomination of Judge Sandra Day O'Connor for a Supreme Court appointment that maybe nobody will notice much if an old sourpuss slips a mite of cynicism into the goings-on, just for the heck of it.

The thing is that the politics of deception — another term for the end justifying the means — doesn't go down easily unless greased with cynicism. Ideally, too, it should be a first-class grade of cynicism — the kind that'll provide a slippery coat for whatever it is we're bent on swallowing, so that, once it's down, we won't even know the cynicism was there in the first place. Now that's good cynicism. It has utility.

I've a hunch that Judge O'Connor may be the best Supreme Court appointment in the past couple of decades.

But doesn't it mean anything at all that President Reagan — when he was candidate Reagan — promised — promised! — the anti-abortion folks he would not name to the highest court in the land anyone whose views on abortion countered theirs?

He sought out the endorsement of the National Right to Life Committee and, in return for that support, pledged Carolyn Gerster, co-founder in Phoenix of that organization, that he would not name a pro-abortionist to the high court.

So she says anyway. Maybe there'll be a denial. But she fills in her story with some rather vivid detail, including the claim that, to turn the tide of support last summer in Iowa that was building among Republicans for George Bush, Reagan told her, "It will mean a lot more to me if you endorse (me) early."

At that point, she claims, Reagan told her that an individual's views on abortion would be a "prime concern" in his choice of Supreme Court nominees, should he be elected.

And she hadn't even asked for that kind of commitment!

Her organization endorsed Reagan immediately.

Well, as the pragmatists say, he has been elected — the point is moot.

Indeed, yes. Even Barry Goldwater, "Mr. Conservatism" himself, said Moral Majority honcho Jerry Falwell ought to be kicked in the rear end or vicinity thereof for creating a fuss about the appointment, and that true Christians, no less, ought to be the kickers.

Even liberals and godless humanists got a kick out of that — old Barry G. teeing off on the electronic huckster of Bible fundamentalism.

But hells bells! — isn't that beside the point? Hasn't anybody — no matter his political or theological persuasion — the right to take a candidate for president at his word?

It was "tacky" — what better

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Judge O'Connor

Five years ago I heard the commencement address made by Judge Sandra Day O'Connor at the Orme School, in Arizona. When someone told me that an Arizona woman had been nominated to the Supreme Court vacancy, I felt quite sure that it must be she. When the news confirmed my judgment, a lump of patriotism rose in my throat.

It isn't often that one feels secure in judging anyone, least of all a judge, by one meeting. Judge O'Connor

is an exception to that need for prudence. She exudes competence and integrity — a degree impossible to fake. She radiates simple, uncomplicated honesty, while, at the same time, exhibiting all of the sophistication necessary in dealing with political sophistry.

In my view, nothing in the Reagan administration's actions is more significant than this appointment which should do more to cool off government by faction than any certain other move which can be imagined. One is tempted to predict that she will disarm even the liberals.

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