

## C-SPAN's Peculiar Interest in *Playboy*

C-SPAN, the network known for its serious and objective programming, has apparently been bitten by the bug of the ratings wars. It has gone out of its way to avoid the O.J. Simpson trial, presumably because it is

covered so extensively on other channels. But the spectacle of former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders saying nasty things about top Republicans in the most recent issue of *Playboy* magazine was too much too ignore.

The task of dealing with the Elders "revelations" fell to Susan Swain, host of the "Washington Journal" morning show. Holding up a copy of the sleazy publication, with a cover showing the "Playmate of the Year" on her back holding her legs up in the air, Swain tried to conduct a serious discussion by phone with the *Playboy* representative who interviewed Elders. He told Swain—not once, not twice, but three times—that the interview was significant because Elders described how the "radical right" had tried to get rid of her.

Political analyst Kevin Phillips, one of the in-studio guests on the same show, was forced to cool his heels as this discussion about the Elders' *Playboy* interview went on for several minutes. One could sense that he wondered where all of it was going to lead. The wonderment was justified, since the Associated Press had already come out with a story about the interview, disclosing that Elders had said some nasty things about Sen. Jesse Helms (R.-N.C.) and racism and House Speaker Newt Gingrich (Ga.) and masturbation.

Would the *Playboy* interviewer repeat those things on the air? Fortunately, viewers were spared that spectacle, which led this columnist to call Connie Brod, the producer of "Washington Journal." I asked Brod why so much attention was devoted to the *Playboy* interview when the "juiciest" parts were not even discussed. Brod responded that she didn't know why Swain didn't go into that. She admitted her interest in the *Playboy* interview was sparked by the AP story about what Elders said about Helms and Gingrich. She thought it was "new and interesting information."

Brod also said, "This is the first time we have done *Playboy*," and insisted that the publication doesn't come into the C-SPAN offices on a regular basis. Instead, she

went out and bought a copy.

But one is still left with the question of what purpose it served. The only answer seems to be that it hyped the magazine and probably sold more copies. This doesn't seem like a great offense in the overall scheme of things, except for the fact that there are many legitimate publications out there that don't get sufficient attention on C-SPAN.