

# Drug comments give Elders' foes more ammunition

By Joyce Price  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders is in hot water again.

One day after she suggested that legalizing drugs would reduce crime, denunciations of her remarks and calls for her resignation continued to mount.

The situation is the latest in a long series of flaps in which Dr. Elders, former director of the Arkansas health department, has been embroiled over controversial comments she has made.

Yesterday, President Clinton said he disagrees with Dr. Elders' opinion about drugs and crime but added that he will "stand behind her four-square."

"When you have someone who is outspoken and energetic like she is, there are going to be times when she'll be outspoken and energetic in a way that I don't necessarily agree with," said Mr. Clinton, who was Dr. Elders' boss when he was governor of Arkansas.

"I think the cost of legalizing drugs would far outweigh the benefits," said the president, whose half brother was once imprisoned for drug dealing. "I certainly stand behind her four-square. I think she's done a good job and she's beginning to really focus the country on a lot of these health problems."

Dr. Elders said yesterday that she had "no second thoughts" about her comments, which she made in response to a question at a National Press Club luncheon Tuesday. She also said she had not been reprimanded or muzzled by the White House.

White House spokesman Arthur Jones confirmed that but said, "She was spoken to by someone in the White House, who reminded her what the administration's position is."

White House spokeswoman Dee Dee Myers said the Elders case was

closed and no further action was contemplated.

But Dr. Elders' remarks drew fire from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle on Capitol Hill, focusing attention on the Clinton administration's drug policy, which some characterized as inadequate.

"I'm shocked to believe that the surgeon general has talked about reduction of crime, when nobody in the administration has talked about anything as it relates to being a health problem," Rep. Charles B. Rangel, New York Democrat, said on ABC-TV's "Good Morning America."

In an interview on National Empowerment Television, House Minority Whip Newt Gingrich said: "As both a parent and as a representative of the people of Georgia . . . I think when the top public health official of the U.S. talks publicly about the legalization of drugs it is time for that official to resign. And I hope that is what happens in the next few days."

Dr. Elders' comments won support from Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke and U.S. District Judge Robert Sweet, both proponents of drug legalization, who appeared on NBC-TV's "Today" and ABC's "Good Morning America," respectively.

Sen. Dennis DeConcini, who voted to confirm Dr. Elders as surgeon general, said her comments were "foolish" and expressed chagrin that "Dr. Elders couldn't discipline herself."

"Surgeon general is such a sensitive position you just can't speak your mind," said Mr. DeConcini, Arizona Democrat. "You have to discipline yourself and ask yourself how [your remarks] will be perceived by the public. . . . I hope she's learned."

Beverly LaHaye, president of Concerned Women for America, said it is a "complete disgrace" that the surgeon general, "the person responsible to seeing to the health care of our country, supports the legalization of drugs."