

Elders interview urges Girl Scouts to admit lesbians

Suggests controlled drug giveaways

By Joyce Price
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Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, in a magazine interview, says the Girl Scouts should admit lesbians, schools should offer children condoms as early as they need them and President Clinton "loves" what she's doing.

Her remarks, made in an April 22 interview with USA Weekend, are bound to stir controversy among conservative and family advocacy groups, who have long criticized Dr. Elders and her policies.

USA Weekend, a supplement feature in some Sunday newspapers including The Washington Times, will publish the interview this Sunday.

In the interview, Dr. Elders reiterated her call for a study to determine if crime would be reduced if drugs were legalized and suggested what should be done if the study recommends decriminalization.

"When we say 'legalize,' I'm really talking about control. . . . We [could] have doctors or clinics set up where addicts can get their drugs free or pay \$1," she said. "Doctors and nurses could be constantly working to reduce the dose and get people off drugs. Then we wouldn't have dealers recruiting our children."

When Dr. Elders first suggested the drug study last year, Mr. Clinton blasted the idea, citing the torment of his half-brother Roger's illicit drug use.

"She's leading a surrender, not a truce in the drug war," said James A. Smith, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission. "It's morally bankrupt, which is totally consistent with much of the rest of what Joycelyn Elders advocates."

Mr. Smith's group and others have taken issue with other Elders comments:

- In an interview this year with the Advocate, a homosexual-oriented magazine, she endorsed homosexuality as "normal and healthy," favored homosexual adoptions, urged the Boy Scouts to lift their ban on homosexuals and

criticized the Christian right's emphasis on sex for procreation rather than pleasure.

- As director of the Arkansas health department, she described her conservative opponents as "very religious non-Christians" and the Roman Catholic Church as the "celibate male-dominated church" while she backed early sex education, abortion and condom distributions in schools.

In the USA Weekend interview, Dr. Elders said schools should start offering condoms to children "whenever they need them. We have junior high school girls having babies, 12-year-olds, 9-year-olds. We had a girl in Arkansas who at 8 gave birth to twins. We must teach them responsibility and make sure they have the availability of a condom."

Asked if she still believes the Boy Scouts should admit homosexuals, she said: "Yes. I also think girls who are lesbians should be allowed to join the Girl Scouts. None of us is good enough, or knows enough, to make decisions about other people's sexual preference."

Sandra Jordan, spokeswoman for the Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital, said her group does not exclude on the basis of sexual orientation. "We have a very open policy, as long as you behave yourself," she said.

But Mr. Smith, of the Southern Baptist Convention, which has 15 million members, said Dr. Elders' positions are "an outright assault on traditional values" and morality.

Mr. Clinton is a Southern Baptist.

Noting the controversy Dr. Elders seems to generate nearly every time she speaks, USA Weekend asked her if the president has ever directed her to "tone down her rhetoric."

"No," she said. "That's not something I expect him ever to do."

In fact, the surgeon general added: "I saw him recently, and he congratulated me on what I've been doing. . . . He said, 'I keep up with you by everywhere you go and what you've been doing. . . . I love it.'"