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# Gays angry at Elders ouster

by Kristina Campbell

Gays reacted with anger and anguish this week to the forced resignation of Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders on December 9.

Elders, one of the Clinton administration's most outspoken figures, achieved something of a hero status among many Gays. Her positions that stirred controversy among many conservatives included support for frank sexuality education for children, Gay adoptions, and legalizing drugs, including marijuana for medicinal purposes.

On Friday, Dec. 9, President Bill Clinton called for Elders to resign after the White House received an inquiry regarding a statement by Elders on World AIDS Day (Dec. 1) about masturbation.

Elders, answering a question from an

right should never be allowed to interfere with public health," Paras said. "I am gravely concerned about the repercussions this message will send to health educators around the country."

Paras said Elders "is a brilliant, articulate, and compassionate leader" who "has been exactly what our country needed."

Tim McFeeley, outgoing executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund, also issued a statement saying that Elders "brought new understanding to public health problems that many of her predecessors were unwilling or unable to face head on."

Soon after being named by Clinton to the surgeon general post, Elders went on record in support of legalizing marijuana for medicinal use. She was a persistent voice in favor of thorough sex education

for children from the early grades. In an interview with the *Advocate* early this year, Elders said she supports allowing Gays to adopt young children; she also has publicly expressed support for Gays to be able to join both the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts programs. In January 1994, Elders delighted Lesbian health activists when she said in a meeting with them that the Department of Health and Human Services should help fund an information campaign on Lesbian health concerns. Activists are still pursuing that idea with HHS.

ing drugs," Gingrich said.

But many of the surgeon general's supporters said Clinton's action sends a frightening message.

"What this says is that the president's doing this quick run to the right, unfortunately," said Troy Petenbrink, spokesperson for the National Association of People with AIDS. "... We hope that this doesn't mean that the president is going to step back from AIDS, and we hope that he will continue his commitment to the epidemic by seeing who he's able to put in front of the Republican Congress for approval. It will be a real test."

Alexander Robinson, board president of the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention, voiced similar concerns in a statement from the task force.

"I believe we as a nation are coming perilously close to valuing spin over substance," Robinson said. "Dr. Elders was our health messenger. The administration killed the messenger instead of facing the fact that our nation's moralizing is costing us the lives of young men and women."

Paul Kawata, executive director of the National Minority AIDS Council, warned that progressives will be watching Clinton and will remember his actions in the next election.

"Members of many social change movements, including people of color, HIV/AIDS activists, and Lesbians and Gays, supported and helped elect President Clinton," Kawata said. "His administration now needs to realize that they cannot continue to direct the orchestra without responding to the needs of its musicians."

Steve Michael of ACT UP/Washington said Clinton "stabbed [Elders] in the back."



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