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Playmate Joycelyn Elders

Joycelyn Elders is not quite the centerfold, but she's finally found a format that suits her rhetoric.

In an interview in Playboy magazine, she's nestled between ads for a provocative video of Julie Cialini, the 1995 Playmate of the Year (who wears only her shoes and socks, gloves and hat), and come-ons for other videos of "loving couples" who "explicitly demonstrate the



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exercises and techniques that have taken their sexuality to new heights."

She repeats her colorful comments about masturbation, which the New York Times defended "as pedagogy," and criticized as politics, "a reckless act of indifference to Mr.

Clinton's fortunes." She continues her attacks on "the very religious non-Christian right," blaming them for a host of historical disasters.

"Where was the church during the Holocaust?" she asks. "Where was the church when the Indians were sent off to reservation? Where was the church when black men were held in slavery for 200 years? You know those God-fearing Christians we're talking about were often the leaders of those kinds of efforts and initiatives."

So much for pedagogy.

When she runs out of specific attacks on Christians, she blames Rush Limbaugh and the dittoheads for undercutting her advice. "I may not like what he says," she says crossly, "but he sells."

She invokes martyrdom through identification with Lani Guinier and Anita Hill though she got to wear that nifty admiral's uniform and they didn't. "The white male structure will fight and oppose any female it sees rising in power," she says. "We're easier targets to knock off. We don't have a strong power base."

Nevertheless, she insists that our Southern white male president

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"wanted the message that I was putting out" because "I never had a problem with him when he was governor." That's no doubt true. After the president the middle-aged white male she most respects is Teddy Kennedy. She particularly likes his "values." "He's the Washington person I would most want to be like."

What's striking about this interview is that the physician the president put in charge of speaking out on health problems — specifically to teach children — chooses to defend her crusade against unwanted teen-age pregnancies in Playboy magazine. She rails, in an aside, about the way men want to make "sex objects" — playmates, you might say — of women.

Joycelyn Elders and her bully pulpit are now merely footnotes for the history books, spicing dull discussions of failed presidential appointments. But the time may be right for the rest of us to ask whether we need a surgeon general at all. Maybe a surgeon sergeant would serve as well.

At most, the job provides a pulpit for restating obvious health messages that most of us, especially teen-agers, already know. At worst, a surgeon general is easily sidetracked into controversies such as how many abortions a very model of a modern surgeon general can perform before he is disqualified for confirmation.

I've suggested that the next surgeon general ought to be a podiatrist. It's hard to create a controversy over corns or a bellyache over bunions, though this administration would probably choose the one who wants to outlaw high heels to protect a woman's back, and would therefore alienate all the white (and black) men who appreciate a taut feminine calf.

In big-deficit America, why can't we just RIF this position, saving a salary which pays as much as \$140,000? Do we really need a chief health adviser who looks like a character out of "H.M.S. Pinafore"? Someone else could tell us that smoking is bad and sex can be lethal. *The surgeon general, with the rank equivalent to a vice admiral in the Navy, originally provided health care to sailors, but the Navy has managed to do quite well without a surgeon general since the turn of the century. (Besides, the "new" Navy needs obstetricians, not surgeons.)*

Dr. Henry Foster, if he is confirmed, is a divisive force already on the issue of abortion with his badly muddled moral message. "Face it," Joycelyn Elders tells Playboy, "if I had been saying everything they wanted to hear, nobody would know who the surgeon general was."

Right on. But if we can't zero out the position, maybe we should eliminate that doorman's uniform, and nobody would take the job.