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CBS's "Face the Nation": Joycelyn Elders, Surgeon General
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CBS "FACE THE NATION"
WITH HOST: BOB SCHIEFFER

INTERVIEW WITH:
SURGEON GENERAL JOYCELYN ELDERS

SUNDAY, MARCH 27, 1994

MR. SCHIEFFER: We're going to begin this morning with Dr. Elders here in Washington after what has been an extraordinary week on the tobacco front. Legislation to ban smoking in ban places is pending and has been for a while in Congress, but this week the secretary of labor said he believes he has the authority to ban it in all work places without congressional authorization. He says he's going to issue regulations to that effect.

Then David Kessler, the head of the Food and Drug Administration, said he is considering what his agency has never done, and that is regulating tobacco as a drug, but he said he'd like some congressional guidance on how to go about it.

And then in the middle of all that, Philip Morris, which is the largest tobacco manufacturer in the world, filed a \$10 billion -- not million, \$10 billion -- libel suit against ABC, the news organization that claimed in a broadcast that cigarette companies are manipulating the amount of nicotine in cigarettes.

So with all that, Dr. Elders, we certainly have plenty to talk about this morning. Let me ask you first about what Dr. Kessler told the Congress this week. He clearly considers cigarettes addictive. Do you think it would be wise to classify them as a drug?

DR. ELDERS: Bob, I feel that there is much evidence to say that nicotine is a drug. We've considered nicotine a drug for a very long time, and I think the way the FDA classifies drugs is based on their intended use, if you will, and so if they are just using what's in cigarettes already and what comes in the form that they use, I think that's how they've escaped regulation. But if the industry can, and if they do -- which I have no evidence that they do -- but if they do control the amounts and regulate it, then it becomes a drug.

MR. SCHIEFFER: So from what you know of it now, it appears to you that nicotine and cigarettes are a drug and that they ought to fall under the Food and Drug Administration and be regulated. That would be what you would advise the Congress to do?

DR. ELDERS: Well, that would be -- if there is evidence that they can regulate the amount of nicotine that's in cigarettes and it appears that the cigarettes are really used as a device, if you will, to deliver this nicotine or this drug, well, then I feel that it should be regulated by the FDA.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, it is hard to understand why cigarettes and

the nicotine in cigarettes -- if what you say is true, why cigarettes have not been regulated by the Food and Drug Administration over years past, because they regulate, for example, the amount of nicotine that goes into nicotine chewing gum, the amount of nicotine that goes in a nicotine patch. How is it that, somehow or another, the amount -- that cigarettes have not been classified in the same way, they haven't looked on them in the same way?

DR. ELDERS: Well, I think that they -- we always felt that it was kind of a natural substance that came in the tobacco leaf, and the industry did not control the amount that was in there, you know, because what was grown in there naturally. I don't know all of the full details on why it has not been regulated, but I think that that's how it has escaped being regulated closely by the FDA like all other drugs.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, if cigarettes are classified as a drug, which they would have to be in order for the Food and Drug Administration to regulate them, would they have any choice but to ban them?

DR. ELDERS: Well, I think -- I'm not sure that they would have to ban them, but I think that they would certainly have to say, well, you know, cigarettes are addictive, you know, we'd have to tell people that they kill. They would need to know the ingredients so they could really make a decision about it, and I think to immediately just ban cigarettes would not necessarily solve the problem, because we would have all of those millions of Americans out there that are addicted to this drug.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Mmm-hmm. (Acknowledgement.)

DR. ELDERS: So now how -- you know, we would really need to make sure that we have classes to get them off drugs, we use the nicotine patches. You know, we just can't immediately ban cigarettes without making sure that we treat our American people.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you now, how does this fit in? You stirred up quite a controversy a couple of weeks or so ago when you said that perhaps we ought to study whether drugs should be legalized. How does what you're saying today square with what you said there?

DR. ELDERS: Well, I would have -- you know, we know that cigarettes kill 435,000 people each year, you know, from heart disease, emphysema, and other things. We really have only less than 20,000 people are killed related directly to drugs. It's really the crime that is related to other drugs on the black market and other things that really create the problem. I felt very -- you know, that we should study the problem and find out what we should do.

I don't know what we should do, but I thought if doctors regulated it, if they'd get people in, we could then begin to treat our people, get them away from drugs, and stop just trying to warehouse them in the prison system to take care of the problem. It's going to soon get to the point that we can't afford any longer to build enough prison cells to take care of everybody that's in prison related to drugs, when we need to be treating them.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let me get back to one other thing that -- I learned something this week that I didn't know about this, and that is that cigarette manufacturers are required to give a list of the

ingredients that go into cigarettes in to the government. I guess the Department of Health and Human Services is the agency that receives that information. Yet I also learned that the law forbids the government from revealing those ingredients to the ban. Do you think that law ought to be changed?

DR. ELDERS: Well, I think, if we get where we regulate cigarettes, regulate nicotine and other drugs, well, then it would be made available and if, you know, but now, you know, there is absolutely a law against making that information available, and it's perhaps withholding information from the public.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I raised that question because Congressman Ron Wyden was quoted just recently as saying chemicals in tobacco products -- there are chemicals in tobacco products that are so toxic they would not be allowed in a landfill under government regulations. Do you know what ingredients go into cigarettes? Do you have access to this information?

DR. ELDERS: I do not have access to this information. It is housed down at Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, and the secretary can request it for the Congress.

MR. SCHIEFFER: But that's a little astonishing. Here you're the nation's head doctor, your name is the one on the cigarette warning labels, and yet you're saying to me by law you can't find out what the ingredients are that go into cigarettes?

DR. ELDERS: Well, that's the truth. You know, it may be that I could find out certain things, but I really do not have access to that information.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Would you like to know?

DR. ELDERS: And, of course, that was based on the regulation -- you know, congressional regulations.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let me shift quickly to a subject that you've talked a lot about, and that is cigarette advertising. What should be done about cigarette advertising? Should it be banned outright? Where would you like to see that issue go?

DR. ELDERS: Bob, we do not allow advertising of cocaine. We do not allow advertising of heroin. And there is no drug that is more addictive that we know about than nicotine, and yet we allow the cigarette industry to target our young people. They have to recruit 3,000 young people a day, and we know that if children do not -- or people who smoke did not start smoking by the time they're 19 years of age, they will probably never smoke.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well now, we're going to have a spokesman for the tobacco industry on in just a moment, and I know what she's going to say. She's going to say, "We don't target young people." Are you saying that they do?

DR. ELDERS: Well, I can't prove that they target young people, but, you know, they -- their advertising plays to all the things that young people want. They want to be sexy, slim, sophisticated, successful, all the things that they'd like, and those are the things that their ads play up. They are most likely to smoke the three brands that are advertised the most -- Marlboro, Newport, and Camels.

MR. SCHIEFFER: So your view is to just ban it all, right?

DR. ELDERS: I feel that we should not be advertising things that prey on our children to induce them to become -- get involved in something that's going to destroy their health.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Do you foresee a day when we will become a smoke-free society?

DR. ELDERS: Yes, I do. It may not be in my lifetime, but I feel that our society will eventually make us a smoke-free society. I think our Congress is doing things now to that end -- that is, that they are asking that we ban cigarette smoking in buildings that have more than 10 people, they're asking that we ban smoking in the work place. Many of our restaurants, like McDonald's, Arby's, Taco Bell are banning cigarette smoking in their restaurant business, and I think we'll see more and more industries banning cigarette smoking. In fact, the attorney generals of the different states are going to try and get smoking banned in all restaurants.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Dr. Elders, we have to leave it at that point. We'll be back. Thank you for coming.

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