



ISSUE BRIEF

TALKING POINTS: WHY HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVIST KEVIN JENNINGS IS NOT FIT FOR THE DEPT. OF EDUCATION

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On May 19, 2009, the Department of Education announced the appointment of Kevin Jennings to serve as Assistant Deputy Secretary for the Office of Safe & Drug Free Schools.¹ Jennings, a homosexual, was the founder of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), and served as its Executive Director until he stepped down in October, 2008.

Jennings and the organization he founded have been the leaders in promoting a pro-homosexual agenda in America's schools, beginning in kindergarten. His positions are extreme and narrow-minded, his rhetoric harsh and hate-filled, and his qualifications and ethical standards questionable at best. For all these reasons, Family Research Council has called upon Education Secretary Arne Duncan to withdraw Jennings' appointment. Here are some key reasons why we believe Kevin Jennings is unfit for public service.

1) Jennings' and GLSEN's concept of "safe schools" means special protections for privileged groups (especially homosexuals), rather than safety for all.

Undoubtedly the key reason why Jennings was appointed was because of GLSEN's long-standing commitment to what they call "safe schools." GLSEN has published "Model State Anti-Bullying & Anti-Harrasment [sic] Legislation." However, it protects against "harassment" only on the basis of "distinguishing characteristics" such as "race, color, national origin, sex, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, [and] religion."² It does not even include the category which GLSEN itself has identified as the most common grounds for harassment: "the way they look or their body size."³ Why not define "harassment" and "bullying" on the basis of the nature of the actual conduct, rather than the characteristics of the victim?

2) The Jennings/GLSEN concept of “safe schools” actually extends far beyond the prevention of “harassment” and “bullying” to active “affirmation” and “promotion” of homosexuality.

In a 1995 speech, Jennings admitted that his rhetoric about “safety” was a political device:

We immediately seized upon the opponent's calling card – safety...[W]e automatically threw our opponents onto the defensive and stole their best line of attack. This framing short-circuited their arguments and left them back-pedaling from day one.⁴

In a 1997 speech, Jennings spoke openly about the desirability of actively “promoting” homosexuality:

We were busy putting out press releases, and saying, “We’re not promoting homosexuality, that’s not what our program’s about. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” [But] being finished [with our efforts] might some day mean that most straight people, when they would hear that someone was promoting homosexuality, would say “Yeah, who cares?” . . . That is our mission from this day forward.⁵

In an article on the GLSEN website in 2000, an unnamed author declared that far from separating “safety” from the “affirmation” of homosexuality, “The pursuit of safety and affirmation are one and the same goal.”⁶

3) Jennings is viciously hostile to religion.

While demanding tolerance for openly homosexual teachers and students, Jennings seems completely unwilling to extend the slightest tolerance to those who may disagree with him on public policy issues. Jennings had an unhappy childhood which included being raised as a Southern Baptist (his father, a minister, died when he was young). By his senior year of high school he rejected religion altogether, as he described in his memoir, *Mama’s Boy, Preacher’s Son*:

God... had done nothing but cause me pain and anguish through His inaction and malevolence throughout my childhood....What *had* he done for me, other than make me feel shame and guilt? Squat. [Scr*w] you, buddy – I don’t need you around anymore, I decided.⁷

Jennings' attitude toward religion – at least toward religions with a traditional view of sexual ethics – seemed to have matured very little by the time he delivered a speech in 2000, where he said:

We have to quit being afraid of the religious right. We also have to quit – ... I'm trying to find a way to say this. I'm trying not to say, [F---] 'em!" which is what I want to say, because I don't care what they think! [audience laughter] Drop dead!⁸

4) Jennings wants only *pro-homosexual* viewpoints to be tolerated in schools.

Although homosexuality is obviously a controversial social issue and the subject of heated political debate in America today, Kevin Jennings wants only one side of this issue to even be aired in schools. In addition, he seems to believe in locking sexually confused young people into a "gay" identity, because he has no tolerance for those who might seek to overcome same-sex attractions:

Ex-gay messages have no place in our nation's public schools. A line has been drawn. There is no "other side" when you're talking about lesbian, gay and bisexual students.⁹

5) Jennings favors indoctrinating even elementary-age children in *pro-homosexual* ideology.

Kevin Jennings wrote the foreword for a book titled *Queering Elementary Education: Advancing the Dialogue About Sexualities and Schooling*.¹⁰ Among its essays is one by a lesbian mother who boasts of teaching her seven-year-old daughter to masturbate and declares that "'queerly raised' children are agents" using "strategies of adaptation, negotiation, resistance and subversion."¹¹

6) By his own account, Jennings failed to protect the "safety" of a homosexual student he once counseled when working as a teacher.

Jennings has told several conflicting versions of a story about a boy who approached him for counsel when Jennings was a teacher at Concord Academy in Massachusetts in the late 1980's. Drawing facts from one or more of three separate accounts of the story, it appears that the boy may have been as young as 15, a sophomore, a substance abuser, very troubled, and finding adult male sexual partners in the bus station restroom in Boston. Yet Jennings apparently never reported these facts to the authorities, the school administration, or the boy's parents. The only step he took to protect the "safety" of this vulnerable teen was to say, "You know, I hope you knew to use a condom."¹²

Some members of the National Education Association protested the decision of the NEA to give an award to Jennings in 2004, citing his handling of the “Brewster” incident as “an unethical practice.”¹³ Jennings¹⁴ and his lawyers¹⁵ denied that he had violated state laws which mandate reporting of child sexual abuse or done anything else unethical. However, when psychologist Warren Throckmorton questioned officials at Concord Academy – the very school where Jennings had taught – about the scenario described in one of Jennings’ accounts, a school spokesman said that:

.... such actions on the part of a student should be reported by a teacher to school administration. Concerning the Brewster story, she added: “The Dean of Students and the Head of School are mandated reporters who have to file a 51A with DSS [Department of Social Services] in a situation such as this.”¹⁶

Jennings’ behavior in this instance calls into question his commitment to truly “safe schools.”

7) Jennings’ own youthful drug use calls into question his suitability for promoting “drug-free schools.”

At several points in his memoir, *Mama’s Boy, Preacher’s Son*, Jennings describes his own use of marijuana while in high school and college. At no point does he express regret for this behavior or an awareness of its potential risks, and the wry tone in which he speaks of it suggests that he finds the use of marijuana, a dangerous “gateway” drug, to be more amusing than troubling. Following is an excerpt from just one of these accounts:

I got stoned more often and went out to the beach at Bellows, overlooking Honolulu Harbor and the lights of the city, to drink with my buddies on Friday and Saturday nights, spending hours watching the planes take off and land at the airport, which is actually quite fascinating when you are drunk *and* stoned.¹⁷

Conclusion

This record shows that Kevin Jennings has neither the temperament nor the ethical standards needed for public service. His history suggests a commitment to preserving the “safety” of only one narrow part of the student population, not all students. He is unfit for the post to which he’s been assigned, and Secretary Duncan should withdraw his appointment at once.

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¹ “Education Secretary Announces Nine Senior Staff Appointments,” online at:
<http://www.ed.gov/print/news/pressreleases/2009/05/05192009d.html>

² *Model State Anti-Bullying & Anti-Harrasment Legislation: Model Language, Commentary and References* (New York: Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, 2007), p. 1; online at:
http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/000/000/755-1.pdf

³ Harris Interactive and GLSEN (2005). *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America, A Survey of Students and Teachers*. New York: GLSEN. Online at:
<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/1859.html?state=research&type=research>

⁴ Kevin Jennings, “Winning the Culture War,” speech presented at the Human Rights Campaign Fund Leadership Conference, March 5, 1995; quoted in “Framing the issue - How the homosexual movement got into the Massachusetts schools,” December 1, 1996; online at:
http://www.massresistance.org/docs/issues/gay_strategies/framing_the_issue.html

⁵ Kevin Jennings, “Looking to the Future” panel discussion, GLSEN Mid-Atlantic Conference, New York, October 25, 1997; cited in Brian Burt, “GLSEN’s Jennings: ‘That is our mission from this day forward,’” *Lambda Report*, Jan.-Feb. 1998; online at:
<http://americansfortruth.com/news/kevin-jennings-1997-transcript-promoting-homosexuality-in-schools-glsen-good-for-kids.html#more-2863>

⁶ “Beyond the Safety Zone,” Resource Center, Staff Development, Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, October 1, 2000; online at:
<http://web.archive.org/web/20010729041311/http://www.glsen.org/templates/resources/record.html?section=18&record=141>

⁷ Kevin Jennings, *Mama’s Boy, Preacher’s Son: A Memoir* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), p. 101.

⁸ Kevin Jennings, speech at Marble Collegiate Church, March 20, 2000; quoted in Peter LaBarbera, “When Silence Would Have Been Golden,” Concerned Women for America, April 10, 2002; online at:
<http://www.cwfa.org/articledisplay.asp?id=2580&department=CFI&categoryid=papers>

⁹ Quoted in George Archibald, “Changing minds: Former gays meet resistance at NEA convention,” *The Washington Times*, July 27, 2004, p. A2.

¹⁰ William J. Letts IV and James T. Sears, *Queering Elementary Education: Advancing the Dialogue About Sexualities and Schooling* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999).

¹¹ Linda Harvey, “Bill Ayers’ ‘gay’ agenda for your kids,” *WorldNetDaily*, October 13, 2008; online at:
<http://www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?pageId=77640>

¹² See Warren Throckmorton, “Remembering Brewster,” August 21, 2005; online at:
<http://www.drthrockmorton.com/print.asp?id=160>

Kevin Jennings, in *One Teacher in Ten: Gay and lesbian educators tell their stories*, Kevin Jennings, ed., (Alyson Publications, 1994), p. 25; cited in Throckmorton, “Remembering Brewster;” and Jennings, *Mama’s Boy, Preacher’s Son*, pp. 161-62, 169.

¹³ George Archibald, “NEA groups protest award to gay studies activist,” *The Washington Times*, July 3, 2004, p. A4.

¹⁴ Kevin Jennings, “A gentle ear and a helping hand,” Letter to the Editor, *The Washington Times*, July 30, 2004, p. A22.

¹⁵ Constance M. Boland, Nixon Peabody LLP, letter to Diane Lenning, August 3, 2004; online at:
<http://wthrockmorton.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/jenningsretractiondemand.pdf>

¹⁶ Throckmorton, “Remembering Brewster.”

¹⁷ Jennings, *Mama’s Boy, Preacher’s Son*, p. 103.