HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVIST
KEVIN JENNINGS
NOT FIT FOR DEPT. OF EDUCATION

Peter Sprigg

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. 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. He also served on the National Finance Committee and was the LGBT Finance Co-Chair for Barack Obama’s presidential campaign.

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. This publication seeks to document the key reasons why we believe Kevin Jennings is unfit for public service. (Note: extended quotations from various publications and speeches are included below to provide context. Key quotations are highlighted in bold.)

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-Harrassment [sic] Legislation.” It defines “harassment” as conduct which:
This is similar language to that used in “hate crime” laws. It seems likely that people who suffer “harassment” based on one of the enumerated characteristics are more likely to be consistently protected than those harassed because of “other distinguishing characteristics” that are not enumerated. Ironically, the enumerated categories of protection in GLSEN’s model legislation do not even include the category which GLSEN itself has identified as the most common grounds for harassment:

The reason most commonly cited for being harassed frequently is a student’s appearance, as four in ten (39%) teens report that students are frequently harassed for the way they look or their body size.

And those who are harassed or bullied for reasons having nothing to do with “distinguishing characteristics” (for example, to steal their lunch money) would not be protected under these policies at all. 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 to a pro-homosexual audience, Jennings admitted that his rhetoric about “safety” was a political device intended to neutralize the concerns ordinary parents might have about whether promoting homosexuality in the schools would threaten the safety of their own children:

In Massachusetts the effective reframing of this issue was the key to the success of the Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth. **We immediately seized upon the opponent's calling card — safety** — and explained how homophobia represents a threat to students' safety by creating a climate where violence, name-calling, health problems, and suicide are common. Titling our report “Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth,” **we 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.\textsuperscript{6}

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

Two years ago, one of our board members, one named Ann Simon, was called to testify before Congress when they had hearings on the promotion of homosexuality in schools. And \textit{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.”} And my best friend, who’s a straight women who lives in London, e-mailed me…and she said, \textit{“So what if you are?”} And I thought of how I can get so wrapped up in my own defensiveness, and…the day-to-day struggle, and stuff, that \textit{being finished might some day mean that most straight people, when they would hear that someone was promoting homosexuality, would say “Yeah, who cares?”} because they wouldn’t necessarily equate homosexuality with something bad that you would not want to promote. . . . All of us who are thinking this way are crazy, because you know what? Sane people keep the world the same [sh*tty] old way it is now. It’s the people who think, \textit{“No, I can envision a day when straight people say, ‘So what if you’re promoting homosexuality?’”} Or straight kids say, \textit{“Hey, why don’t you and your boyfriend come over before you go to the prom and try on your tuxes on at my house?”} That if we believe that can happen, we can make it happen. The only thing that will stop us is our lack of faith that we can make it happen. \textit{That is our mission from this day forward.}\textsuperscript{7}

In an article on the GLSEN website in 2000, the unnamed author declared that far from separating “safety” from the “affirmation” of homosexuality, \textit{“The pursuit of safety and affirmation are one and the same goal.”} Here is an extended excerpt:

For many educators, however, the safety zone represents a place of comfort and quiescence. Once persuaded that secure, harassment-free schools for LGBT people is a necessary objective, it is easy for members of the educational community to feel as though they have done their duty. Implementing policies and programs that keep LGBT students from harm’s way feels like the right thing to do—and indeed it is. In this safety zone, however, few educators
feel compelled to elevate the status of their LGBT students from a protected class to a valued group within the school community. Far too often, responding to name calling and acts of anti-gay bias appears necessary, but curricular inclusion of LGBT issues seems inappropriate. Supporting violence and suicide prevention initiatives feels like the right thing to do, but welcoming LGBT students to bring their same-sex dates to the prom is beyond the bounds of what is acceptable. Think, for a moment, about the mixed messages this sends both to LGBT and straight students.

In the end, any intervention aimed solely at maintaining safety will be incapable of affecting the type of change that would render safe schools policies unnecessary in the first place. The time has come to demand more from our school and community leaders, and the educators who work on the front lines every day. The need for discrimination-free schools can no longer be divorced from the need for schools to welcome their LGBT members. The pursuit of safety and affirmation are one and the same goal; each makes the other possible and reinforces the potential for communities that are authentically ethical.\(^8\)

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:

Before, I was the one who was failing God; now I decided He was the one who had failed me. I had tried to please Him, had placed my faith in Him, had prayed for Him to lift this cross from my shoulders, and He had repeatedly let me down. Why put faith in Him? God hadn’t saved my dad, hadn’t saved me, had done nothing but cause me pain and anguish through His inaction and malevolence throughout my childhood. I decided I had done nothing wrong: He had, by promising to “set you free” and never delivering on His promise. 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. The Baptist Church had left me only a legacy of self-hatred, shame and
disappointment, and I wanted no more of it or its Father. The long erosion of my faith was now complete, and I, for many years, reacted violently to anyone who professed any kind of religion."

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 (at a liberal church) in 2000, where he said:

Twenty percent of people are hard-core fair-minded [pro-homosexual] people. Twenty percent are hard-core [anti-homosexual] bigots. We need to ignore the hard-core bigots, get more of the hard-core fair-minded people to speak up, and we’ll pull that 60 percent [of people in the middle] … over to our side. That’s really what I think our strategy has to be. **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!"

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.

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.* 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.” The book is also praised— in a blurb on the
back cover—by President Obama’s Chicago associate, the former domestic terrorist William Ayers.  

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 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. The very fact that these stories are inconsistent with each other raises ethical questions about the truthfulness of Jennings’ supposedly non-fiction writings. In his 1994 book *One Teacher in Ten* (the title is based on the discredited myth, now abandoned even by “gay” activist groups, that ten percent of the population is homosexual), Jennings tells the story this way:

I remember **Brewster, a sophomore boy** who I came to know in 1987, my first year of teaching at Concord Academy, in Concord, Massachusetts. Brewster was a charming but **troubled kid**. His grades didn’t match up with his potential, his attendance could be irregular, and he often seemed a little out of it. He was clearly using some substance regularly, and was not very happy with himself. But I didn’t have a clue as to why—at least not at first.

I had come to Concord from Moses Brown in search of a place where I could be more open about who I was. I wore a ring that symbolized my commitment to my partner, and students like Brewster started asking me what it meant. Confused, I went to the head to ask how I should respond. “Tell them it’s a gift from someone you love,” he said. Incredulous, I replied, “Do you say your wedding ring is a ‘gift from someone you love’?” I answered Brewster’s question about my ring honestly. To my surprise, he and the other students who asked didn’t turn away from me, unlike my peers who had turned away from Mr. Korn in 1978. They didn’t seem to care much at all about my being gay.

Toward the end of my first year, during the spring of 1988, Brewster appeared in my office in the tow of one of my advisees, a wonderful young woman to whom I had been “out” for a long time. “Brewster has something he needs to talk with you about,” she intoned ominously. Brewster squirmed at the prospect of telling, and we sat silently for a short while. On a hunch, I suddenly asked “What's his name?” Brewster’s eyes widened briefly, and then out spilled a story about his involvement with an older man he had met in Boston. I listened, sympathized, and
offered advice. He left my office with a smile on his face that I would see every time I saw him on the campus for the next two years, until he graduated.\textsuperscript{14}

In his 2006 memoir, Jennings tells a very similar story, but the boy bears a different pseudonym, and the references to the boy’s substance abuse and the age of his partner are excised:

Robertson was one of the kids who ended up in my office on a number of occasions. He was bright and personable, a quirky kid who loved drama and literature . . . He was also underachieving and prone to frequent absences. I didn’t get it. But I liked him, and tried to let him know I cared. On this spring day, Robertson showed up at my office door in the tow of Christine, one of my official advisees. “Robertson needs to talk to you,” Christine said, and practically shoved the young man into my office before closing the door behind her.

A brief, awkward silence ensued. . . . “You had something you wanted to talk with me about?”


We stared at each other intently, and I suddenly knew what this was about.

“Let’s start with the basics, then. What’s his name?”

Robertson’s eyes widened. “How did you know?”

. . . Robertson soon told me his tale, about someone he’d met in Boston, how he thought he loved him, and how heartbroken he was that his calls never got returned. I . . . tried to look sympathetic about his lost true love—who, I didn’t have the heart to tell him, had probably forgotten Robertson’s name by now. Unburdened and relieved, he stood to go.\textsuperscript{15}

Jennings returns to “Robertson’s” story a few pages later, and the sexual nature of the boy’s relationships become more clear:

As the fall wore on, Robertson continued to drop by my office to chat, often updating me on his latest “adventures.” Sometimes these startled me, and I began to underline the importance of safe sex to him. One day he snapped back, “Why should I use a condom? My life isn’t worth saving anyway.”\textsuperscript{16}

The stories Jennings has told in writing about “Brewster/Robertson” are considerably different from the one Mr. Jennings told in Iowa at a 2000
And it took me back to 12 years ago at Concord Academy in Concord, Massachusetts where I taught, where I was a very scared young gay teacher. I’d been fired from my first job for being gay.

And I was in my first month on the job and I had an advisee named Brewster. Brewster was missing a lot of classes; he was in boarding school so I said to his teacher, his first period teacher, I said, “Next time Brewster misses a class I want you to tell me that he’s missed that class and, uh, I will go find him.” So I went and found Brewster one morning when she called and he was asleep in his dorm room.

And I said, “Brewster, what are you doing in there asleep?” And he said, “Well, I’m tired.” And I said, “Well we all are tired and we all got to school today.” And he said, “Well I was out late last night.” I said, “What were you doing out late on a school night?” And he said, “Well, I was in Boston...” Boston’s about 45 minutes from Concord. I said, “What were you doing in Boston on a school night, Brewster?” He got very quiet, and he finally looked at me and said, “Well I met somebody in the bus station bathroom and I went home with him.” High school sophomore, 15 years old. That was the only way he knew how to meet gay people. I was a closeted gay teacher, 24 years old, didn’t know what to say, knew I should say something quickly. So I finally said — my best friend had just died of AIDS the week before — I looked at Brewster and said, “You know, I hope you knew to use a condom.” He said to me something I’ll never forget — he said, “Why should I, my life isn’t worth saving anyway.”

Sex between an adult and a young person below the “age of consent” is a crime known as statutory rape, and would have to be classified as sexual abuse even if the minor did “consent” to the relationship. Some states mandate that people in certain professions (such as teachers) report all forms of child abuse, including sexual abuse, to the authorities. Ironically, Jennings himself has made this point in another of his books, Always My Child, writing:

DID YOU KNOW? Teachers, counselors, and principals may violate state child abuse laws if they don’t report abuse to the state authorities. Failure to do so can have serious consequences.
Yet Jennings apparently did not report Brewster’s high-risk sexual behavior (and possible victimization) to legal authorities, school officials, or the boy’s parents. 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.” Jennings called the accusation “inaccurate and potentially libelous,” and his lawyers sent a letter demanding a retraction. However, he also refused to answer questions about the incident from reporter George Archibald of The Washington Times.

The lawyer’s letter defended Jennings on the basis of his account in One Teacher in Ten, but psychologist Warren Throckmorton has thoroughly documented the discrepancies between that account and the one he gave at the Iowa rally. While we certainly do not have enough information to prove that Jennings violated the law, officials at the very school where the incident occurred told Throckmorton that the scenario presented in the 2000 account should have triggered a report of abuse. Following is part of Throckmorton’s account:

In neither story does Mr. Jennings mention any efforts to alert parents, school officials or the authorities. In the Nixon Peabody [lawyer’s] letter, he said he did not have a reason to report these events. This is difficult to understand given the statute in Massachusetts mandating the report of sexual activity between an adult and child under 18 at that time. When presented with the transcript of the Brewster scenario as recorded at the lecture in Iowa, Tara Bradley, Director of Communication at Concord Academy 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.”

Even if it could be shown that Jennings broke no law, public service requires adherence to a higher ethical standard. Instead of threats of legal action, Jennings now owes the public a thorough explanation of the “Brewster” incident. A 15-year-old who meets sexual partners in a bus station restroom requires more than a condom to be “safe,” so 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 are some excerpts of these accounts:

“Fun” turned out to consist of two six-packs and a couple of joints for us to split—a lot for a boy who had never drunk or smoked before—a little too much, in fact. By the time I got home, I was weaving like a proverbial drunken sailor.

. . . Mom sprung up from the dining table and cut me off at the pass.

“L, I don’t believe it,” she sputtered when she got up close and the smell of alcohol overpowered her. “You’re DRUNK!” (She didn’t know how to recognize the smell of pot, thank God.) “How did this happen.”

Stoned as I was, this struck me as a hilarious question, as the answer—“Well, I drank some alcohol, Mom”—seemed fairly obvious. I started laughing. 26

I started spending a lot more time with my friend Troy after that, getting stoned on the hill behind his house, chowing down on the leftovers I’d snag from my after-school job at Taco Bell when the munchies hit. 27

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. 28

In Harvard Yard there were graduate student proctors who kept an eye on you, but in houses there were subject tutors who didn’t care much how we behaved. In fact, they were more like buddies and would drink and get stoned with us, unlike the proctors we had to sneak around. 29

**Conclusion**

This record raises serious questions about whether Kevin Jennings has the temperament and the ethical standards needed for public service. His
history suggests a commitment to policies that promote the safety of only one narrow part of the student population, not all students. There is nothing whatsoever in his background which would qualify him to promote “drug-free schools.” 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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Peter Sprigg is senior fellow for policy studies at Family Research Council.

Notes

1 “Education Secretary Announces Nine Senior Staff Appointments,” online at: http://www.ed.gov/print/news/pressreleases/2009/05/05192009d.html
2 “Biography,” online at: http://kevinjennings.com/blog/biography/
3 Note: the difference between “sex” and “gender” is unclear, especially since “gender identity or expression” is listed separately later.
6 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
8 “Beyond the Safety Zone,” Resource Center, Staff Development, Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, October 1, 2000; online at: http://www.glsen.org/templates/resources/record.html?section=18&record=141

15 Mama’s Boy, Preacher’s Son, pp. 161-62.

Ibid., p. 169

17 Note: this statement also conflicts with the account in his memoir, which indicates that his departure from his first teaching job, at Moses Brown School in Providence, RI, was voluntary: “The moment that I decided that I could no longer stay at Moses Brown came that fall. . . . By spring I had found another job at a place called Concord Academy . . .” Mama’s Boy, Preacher’s Son, pp. 146, 148.


An audio file of the Jennings speech is available online via a link in: Warren Throckmorton, “Kevin Jennings appointed to Department of Education post,” June 2, 2009; online at: http://wthrockmorton.com/2009/06/02/kevin-jennings-appointed-to-department-of-education-post/

I have slightly altered Throckmorton’s transcript of the talk after listening to the audio file.


23 Throckmorton, “Kevin Jennings appointed to Department of Education post.”

24 Throckmorton, “Remembering Brewster.”

Ibid.

26 Jennings, Mama’s Boy, Preacher’s Son, pp. 92-93.

27 Ibid., p. 101.

28 Ibid., p. 103.

29 Ibid., p. 113.