

Anything But Straight: Holsinger Does Harm

June 7, 2007
By Wayne Besen

With an approval rating hovering at Nixonian levels and Rush Limbaugh firing spitballs from the right over immigration, it didn't take a brain surgeon to guess that George W. Bush would try to appease conservatives by nominating a Neanderthal for Surgeon General.

Out from the cave ambled James W. Holsinger, the most homophobic doctor since Isaiah Washington – the Grey's Anatomy's star – had to go to rehab for dropping F-bombs. But Washington was a make believe doctor, while Holsinger is very real and has the potential to inflict great harm on the GLBT community.

The Lexington Herald-Leader reported that Holsinger started Hope Springs Community Church in Kentucky. Rev. David Calhoun, the pastor of the big aluminum trailer church said that Hope Springs has an "ex-gay" ministry.

"We see that as an issue not of orientation but a lifestyle," Calhoun said. "We have people who seek to walk out of that lifestyle."

Holsinger also served on the Judicial Council for the United Methodist Church where he opposed a decision to allow a lesbian to be an associate pastor. He was even so extreme that he endorsed a pastor who tried to prohibit an openly gay man from joining a church.

Clearly, Holsinger is an ideologue whose medieval medical views on gay and lesbian people resemble sorcery more than sound science. The last thing America needed was another deplorable nominee who isn't up to the job, but this is exactly what Bush delivered.

When this nation required a humble Secretary of Defense – we got Rumsfeld. When we wanted a legal scholar at the Justice Department, we got the tort-meister of torture, Alberto Gonzales. When a soothing voice was necessary to repair America's tattered image, Bush sent John Bolton – a man with the diplomatic touch of Napalm – to the United Nations. Now, Bush is poised to make us the laughingstock of the world by nominating Dr. Discrimination as the nation's top doctor.

It appears Holsinger is the latest example of affirmative action for religious zealots in the Bush Administration. The President has stocked the ranks with fundamentalist Christian cronies, such as Monica Goodling, whose only notable achievement was covering a naked statue at the Justice Department with a drape. Indeed, the Boston Globe reported in May that 150 Regent University alumni had been hired to federal government positions since Bush took office in 2001. That's right, the fate of our nation has been put in the hands of graduates of Pat Robertson U.

Of Course, the fact that Holsinger is a person of faith is not the problem. The issue is his archaic views about gay and lesbian people that are rejected by every respected medical and mental health organization in America. Just because he is religious does not give Holsinger a "get out of reality free card" when it comes to outdated ideas that are incompatible with modern medicine.

There are many highly qualified people of faith Bush could have nominated who choose to live in the 21st Century and reject religion-based discrimination – but he elected to nominate a retrograde relic who must be defeated in the Senate.

Holzinger's nomination has drawn howls from my organization, Truth Wins Out, as well as the Human Rights Campaign, The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, SoulForce and the Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project in Boston. This chorus of heated opposition will only grow in the coming weeks, as people learn more about Holzinger.

“For the last 20 years, James Holsinger has been the worst kind of bully inside the United Methodist Church,” said Rev. Troy Plummer, Executive Director of Reconciling Ministries Network of United Methodists. “As a member of a sexuality study team in 1991, he used his position as a medical doctor to promote skewed and inaccurate information regarding gay men.”

Holsinger's nomination will go before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, chaired by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) Presidential candidates Sens. Barack Obama (D-IL), Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) and Christopher Dodd (D-CT) sit on this committee. It will be interesting to see what they do about this troubling nomination and if they ask Holzinger questions about his anti-gay activities.

These senators must be made to understand how deeply offensive this nomination is for GLBT people. Our history is littered with those who endured shock treatment, lobotomies and other forms of torture in the name of medicine. At Truth Wins Out, I often deal with victims of “ex-gay” psychological abuse who are scarred for life by people who operate ministries – like the one reportedly run by Holzinger's church.

If doctors live by the dictum “first do no harm,” Holzinger in no way can reconcile his suitability for Surgeon General, with the often-catastrophic consequences caused by “ex-gay” programs.