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News

Canceled Miss. Prom Brings Attention to Student Protection Bill

by Kilian Melloy Monday Mar 15, 2010



Rep. Jared Polis (Source:AP)

When Constance McMillen wanted to bring another girl to prom as her date, and got the American Civil Liberties union (ACLU) involved, the Itawamba County School District not only said no to the Itawamba Agricultural High School student; it said no to all it students by canceling the event outright.

The ACLU has taken up the case and brought suit against the school district to get the prom back on track, the Associated Press reported on March 12. The school district said that the cancellation was "due to the distractions to the educational process caused by recent events," but the decision brought discord to the school--and national attention to the school district's officials.

Openly gay columnist Dan Savage reported on March 12 that word had spread via social networking sites. A Facebook page called Let Constance Take Her Date to Prom was headed to 100,000 members before the start of last weekend; meantime, others had stepped up to provide a prom to Constance and her schoolmates, with the Mississippi Safe Schools Coalition raising funds for a "Second Change Prom, while a New Orleans hotelier offered space for the event--and transportation from Fulton, Miss., where McMillen's school is located--to New Orleans and back home again for the students--all for free.

The fracas has a political side as well. Supporters of a bill sponsored by an openly gay Colorado congressman say that the case underscores the need for legislation that guarantees equal treatment for LGBT youth.

Democratic Rep. Jared Polis had introduced his bill, The Student Anti-Discrimination Act, in January, but the events in Fulton, Miss. show the timely nature of the proposed measure, supporters say. The National Stonewall Democrats issued a petition, together with a statement saying, "What's happening in Mississippi unfortunately happens all too often around the country, and not just during Prom season. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students--and those students who are perceived to be LGBT or who associate with LGBT students--are subjected to discrimination, including harassment, bullying, violence; and are deprived of equal access to educational opportunities."

Said Polis, "Like Title VI for minorities in the 60s and Title IX for women in the '70s, my legislation puts LGBT students on an equal footing with their peers, so they can attend school and get a quality education, free from fear."

"What a shame that the school district said no prom for anybody," Polis told Denver news station KDVR. "No one's going to have any fun, just because they didn't like the date one girl was taking. I mean, what a ridiculous example of why we need to protect kids from this kind of thing--and, obviously, there's a lot more serious cases than that. In other cases, gay and lesbian kids are getting beat up and even killed." Added Polis, "If there's a kid who's being picked on because they're gay, or beaten up, sometimes they'll go to a teacher, go to a faculty, and they won't do anything." Polis' bill, which has picked up 60 co-sponsors, "will give that kid some protection and make sure they have the right to go to school and be safe just like every other kid," Polis said.

Critics Warn of 'Gay Indoctrination'

Even before the fracas in Fulton, critics were quick to warn that "homosexual indoctrination" at the nation's public schools will be the result if the bill becomes law, reported Fox News in a Feb. 23 article that was illustrated not with a photo of Polis, but rather one of Kevin Jennings, the Obama appointee who serves as the assistant deputy secretary for the Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. Jennings has been smeared by social and religious conservatives for his work with the organization he founded, the safe-schools group Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), which provides materials and support for Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in the nation's schools. Jennings has been accused of supporting pedophilia because, conservative pundits claimed, he

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failed to report it to authorities when a student at the Massachusetts school where he taught more than two decades ago was "involved" with an older man. The charges have been repeated even though the student--now a grown man--has come forward to correct the record and say that he was not sexually involved with the older man he had mentioned to Jennings, and that even if he had been, he was 16 years old at the time--the age of consent in Massachusetts.

The Cato Institute's Neal McCluskey warned that because Polis' bill outlaws harassment of GLBT students, other students from religious backgrounds that view gays and lesbians as "sinners" could be criminally charged if they give voice to their opinions of gays. "That's a violation of those kids who want to express opposition to LGBT opinions or behavior," McCluskey claimed. "People have a legitimate reason to be concerned about this [bill]--not because they're 'haters,' but because you're now trying to balance different rights." Added McCluskey, "If this is passed, it's going to almost certainly in some places be interpreted far too broadly, and free-speech rights will be trampled."

Similar criticisms have been made of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, the first federal law that extends protections to GLBT Americans. Though the law, which was signed by President Obama last year, only prosecutes violent acts against minorities who have been targeted because of factors such as race or sexuality, religious and social conservatives condemned the bill as an attempt to impose prosecution for "thought crimes" on Americans.

That legislation continues to excite controversy. The [Oklahoma State Senate](#) recently voted for a bill to "opt out" of the federal law, and sacrifice \$5 million in federal funds that the state would have received. The bill was introduced by Steve Russell, a Republican state senator who said he was concerned that the federal law would lead to local law enforcement seeing cases taken away from them by federal investigators. Russell, too, claimed that the law would punish people for simply expressing anti-gay sentiments.

*Kilian Melloy reviews media, conducts interviews, and writes commentary for EDGEBoston, where he also serves as Assistant Arts Editor.*

COMMENTS

"Canceled Miss. Prom Brings Attention to Student Protection Bill"



**Anonymous**, 2010-03-15 21:32:47

It's unfortunate that our country has fallen into such a fallen state where homosexuality is not considered a sin. I support the schools decision not to allow this student to exploit her sin condition. The bible clearly states that this is an abomination. Just because society now says it's a born condition doesn't make it so. We are all born sinners and without the blood of Christ we are lost. I think the best support for this girl is to pray for her sin and to hope for her to recognize it and confess to God.

Avg. Rating: ★★★★★ Rate it: ★★★★★



**Anonymous**, 2010-03-15 22:26:01

The bible also consider that the sun travels around the earth, and that you should kill and then it says not to kill, forced Joseph to married Marry under the US law marry someone knowing that it won't be consummated is consider a felony, the bible also says that is ok every so on two have more than one wife, the bible also said that we all came from adan and eve, so after that we were having sex among brothers and sisters, and so on, homosexuals are born that way and if some can chose between discrimination and ignorance base on a book that makes no sense. I am up for teaching children that in FACT in the United States equality is a matter of opinion and that the country once born under principles of equality and freedom is now a country were inequality and religious obsession are more likely to be ruling.

Avg. Rating: ★★★★★ Rate it: ★★★★★



**Anonymous**, 2010-03-15 22:27:26

The bible also consider that the sun travels around the earth, and that you should kill and then it says not to kill, forced Joseph to married Marry under the US law marry someone knowing that it won't be consummated is consider a felony, the bible also says that is ok every so on two have more than one wife, the bible also said that we all came from adan and eve, so after that we were having sex among brothers and sisters, and so on, homosexuals are born that way and if some can chose between discrimination and ignorance base on a book that makes no sense. I am up for teaching children that in FACT in the United States equality is a matter of opinion and that the country once born under principles of equality and freedom is now a country were inequality and religious obsession are more likely to be ruling.

Avg. Rating: ★★★★★ Rate it: ★★★★★



**Anonymous**, 2010-03-15 22:58:11

Oh please, spare us your lecture. Oh, this is a gay news app....shouldn't you be on the "living in the dark ages"app?

Avg. Rating: ★★★★★ Rate it: ★★★★★

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**Anonymous**, 2010-03-15 23:59:03

Why do the Christers keep coming on these sites and attempting to hijack the discussion with their idiocy?

Avg. Rating: ☆☆☆☆☆ Rate it: ☆☆☆☆☆



**Anonymous**, 2010-03-16 00:34:26

There is only one verse that really deals w/ homosexuality, but many more that speak to love

Avg. Rating: ☆☆☆☆☆ Rate it: ☆☆☆☆☆

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