

**NATIONAL news**



The White House allegedly attempted to discredit ABC's Jeffrey Kofman because he is a gay Canadian

"While the facts behind this reported smear are unclear, the news coverage itself and the implications are very serious for all journalists and equally troubling for the American public," executive director Pamela Strother said. "Whenever the coverage of a lesbian or gay journalist or the nationality of a reporter is criticized and discredited simply because of the individual's birthright or sexual orientation—that is a form of dangerous intimidation and a potential professional libel."

The White House dismissed suggestions it was behind the smear campaign. Kofman said that he is unsure why anyone would want to "out" him as a Canadian and that the real story is what's going on in Iraq.

"I think it's not surprising in certain ways that a provocative story provokes," he told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. "It's all a little perplexing and kind of a sideshow. I think you just have to kind of look at this and roll your eyes and move on."

U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., stuck his foot in his mouth again in response to a question about what he would do if one of his six children told him of "gay urges."

"I would try to point out to them what is the right thing to do," he told GQ in an interview published July 22. "And we have many temptations to do things we shouldn't do...it doesn't mean you have to submit."

Later, when asked what he would do if one of his children was gay, he said, "Continue to help them in their life in a way that would lead them to a better and happier life." Kevin Jennings, executive director of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, called the remarks "troublesome and potentially harmful" to queer and questioning adolescents.

"Mainstream mental health and educational authorities have made it clear how we can help LGBTQ youth achieve the 'better and happier life' that the senator speaks of: We must support them in accepting their sexual orientation, which is an innate characteristic, and provide them with homes, schools and communities that value and respect who they are," he said. "Any suggestion contrary to medically accepted wisdom on this subject...especially from a member of the Senate leadership, is dangerously irresponsible, inflammatory and outrageous."

GLSEN called on Santorum to retract his statements and clarify what he plans to do to help parents create healthier and happier lives for queer and questioning youth. In an interview with The Associated Press published April 22, the third-ranking Republican in the U.S. Senate likened homosexuality to bigamy, polygamy, incest and adultery.

**LOUISIANA**

Arguing that six Louisiana nursing homes violated federal law by refusing to care for

a stroke victim because he has HIV, Lambda Legal filed a discrimination complaint July 23 with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights.

A month before Cecil Little, 50, was discharged from the hospital, his mother and his sister approached a nursing home within six miles of where they live. That facility, Tangi Pines, agreed to care for him but, just three days before he was due to arrive, backed out of the agreement upon learning of his HIV status.

Five other nearby nursing homes also revoked their agreements to provide care to him. Since Lambda Legal believes these six nursing homes accept Medicare or Medicaid, they are bound by the Federal Rehabilitation Act, which prohibits facilities that receive federal funds from discriminating against people with disabilities.

"Cecil Little requires help meeting his most basic needs, and discrimination based on his HIV status should not dictate where he gets those needs met," attorney Brian Chase said. "What makes this case even more frustrating is that we are dealing with health care professionals here—these are the people who should help dispel baseless fears about HIV, not perpetuate them."

Last month a similar case was settled in Pennsylvania. A 56-year-old legally blind man with AIDS filed a discrimination complaint against a personal care home that refused to admit him because the staff would be uncomfortable caring for him. The man dropped the charges when the facility offered him a room.

**ARKANSAS**

A lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union regarding an Arkansas school's treatment of a 14-year-old for being openly gay ended July 17 with districtwide policy changes to ensure fair treatment of queer students.

"I'm really glad that this is all over and that the ACLU is making the school treat gay students the way they should have been treated in the first place," Thomas McLaughlin said. "No more students should have to go through what I did."



Thomas McLaughlin

The Pulaski County Special School District officials had "outed" McLaughlin to his parents without his permission, made him read from the Bible and disciplined him for talking about his sexual orientation and later for talking about that punishment. These actions, the ACLU lawsuit charged, violated his rights to free speech, equal protection and privacy as well as his religious liberty.

Under the terms of the agreement, the district issued a formal apology to McLaughlin and his parents and paid a total of \$25,000 in damages and attorney fees. School officials also expunged his disciplinary record and banned:

- Disclosing any student's sexual orientation to others.
- Punishing students for talking during non-instructional time about their sexual orientation.
- Punishing students for talking during non-instructional time about discipline they've received.
- Discriminating against students on the basis of their sexual orientation in disciplinary matters.
- Forcing students to read the Bible. **JM**

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