

'Obviously, privacy was breached'

Anti-Gay group tapes teens at gathering sponsored by GLSEN

by Will O'Bryan

Scott Whiteman sat in on a workshop titled "What They Didn't Tell You About Queer Sex and Sexuality in Health Class" with about 30 other people Saturday, March 25. It was one workshop at a conference designed for 14 to 21-year-old males

and females and organized by the Boston chapter of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network at Tufts University in Massachusetts.

But Whiteman was not a young person struggling to understand his sexual orientation. He was, and is, the executive director of the anti-Gay

group called the Parents' Rights Coalition of Massachusetts, and he was secretly taping the workshop — a workshop the young people had been assured was strictly confidential.

Not only did the official of the statewide Newton-based anti-Gay

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Safer-sex chat for youth generates controversy

Taped portions publicized; GLSEN director calls for clarified guidelines for workshops

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group tape the workshop — which, naturally, included frank discussion by the youth about various sexual issues — he produced transcripts of the discussion to be published in an anti-Gay newspaper which is distributed free, door-to-door to a reported 225,000 people throughout the state. And he provided excerpts of the tape to be played on a Boston radio station.

Whiteman also shared his transcripts in Washington, D.C., at an April 27 press conference sponsored by an anti-Gay group called Americans for Truth About Homosexuality. At that press conference, Peter LaBarbera, the group's director, said, "When Gay activists pose as protectors of youth, parents have a duty to ask: What are they teaching kids? And can we trust Gay and pro-Gay adults — not to mention homosexual activists — with our children?" according to the Conservative News Service's CNSNews.com Web site. GLSEN criticized the secret taping of the workshop as a threat to the youths' privacy.

"Our primary concern was that this was a youth safe-sex workshop and confidentiality was guaranteed," said Jim Anderson, a GLSEN spokesperson. "These youths' identities could be revealed. Obviously, their privacy was breached."

Anderson added that Whiteman's coalition has for years been at odds with GLSEN and efforts in Massachusetts to protect Gay students.

"This is yet another step they're taking to undermine the tremendous and important work that's taking place to make Massachusetts schools safe," Anderson said.

Anderson said Whiteman's secret taping was also a violation of Massachusetts wiretap laws.

One of the workshop facilitators, Julie Neherland, a coordinator with the State Department of Education's AIDS education program, filed a civil complaint and Massachusetts Superior Court Judge Allan van Gestel issued an order on May 17 ordering officials of the Parents' Rights Coalition to stop disclosing the contents of the workshop.

As of this week, however, some excerpts were still available on the Web site of the anti-Gay newspaper, the Massachusetts News, including quotes from workshop facilitators about fisting, how Lesbians have sex, where the "G-spot" is, and whether to "spill after you suck another boy." Meanwhile, one workshop facilitator has been fired,

another has resigned, some state legislators have expressed a desire to curtail state funding of programs to help Gay youth, and even GLSEN has expressed its own concerns about what took place at the workshop and taken its lumps over it.

Kevin Jennings, GLSEN's national executive director, told the Boston Herald in mid-May that his agency would provide clearer guidelines to workshop facilitators in the future.

"Like the Parents' Rights Coalition and the Department of Education, GLSEN is also troubled by some of the content that came up during this workshop," Jennings said, as reported in the Herald. "We need to make our expectations and guidelines to outside facilitators much more clear... [W]e are surprised and troubled by some of the accounts we've heard."

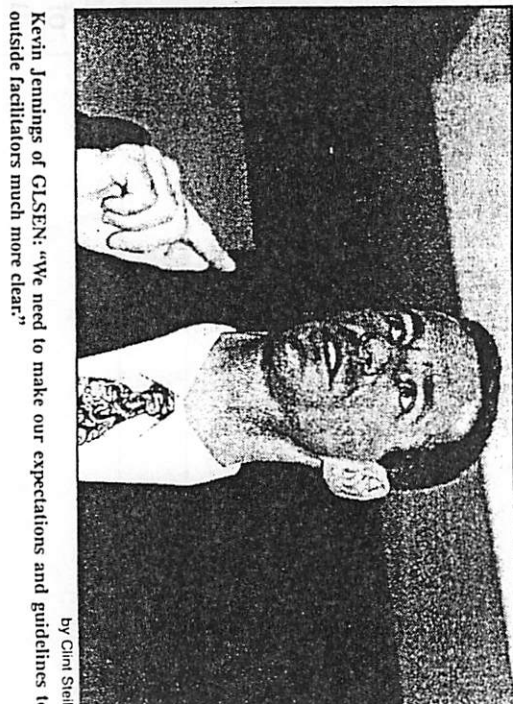
Anderson explained that, at such statewide conferences, facilitators submit proposals for workshops which the GLSEN host chapter approves.

"My understanding is [the facilitators, though state employees] were serving as volunteers," Anderson explained. "They were serving as private citizens in this capacity."

Nevertheless, David P. Driscoll, the Massachusetts commissioner of education, released a statement May 19 that read, in part: "Of the two Department of Education employees involved in the workshops held at the GLSEN conference, one has resigned and the other was dismissed today. The third individual involved in the workshop has a service contract with the department. This contract was terminated as of yesterday."

Driscoll's statement makes no mention as to why the personnel changes were made, saying only that "this type of situation will not occur again under my watch." The statement did, however, affirm the state's commitment to "effective AIDS/HIV prevention education."

Like Jennings, Anderson emphasized that GLSEN will make efforts to ensure that information provided to Gay



Kevin Jennings of GLSEN: "We need to make our expectations and guidelines to outside facilitators much more clear."

by Clint Stiehl

youths is age appropriate. He added, however, "GLSEN's position on safer-sex education is that we absolutely and fundamentally affirm young people's rights to have access to age-appropriate sex education." This information, said Anderson, is not available to students at school.

About 125 to 150 people marched in front of the Department of Education offices in Malden, Mass., June 1 to protest Driscoll's action, according to the Boston Globe. "It's a shame that Commissioner Driscoll has scapegoated two fine individuals who were simply answering questions from students at a sex education workshop," said Bennett Klein of Boston-based Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, in an interview with the Boston Globe. "... These were questions posed by the students themselves. I think it's also unfortunate that the commissioner has really caved in to a group of people who infiltrated a workshop intended for young people and illegally taped a private discussion which young people were having. ... [The Parents' Rights Coalition does not] want schools creating safety for Gay and Lesbian youth and they have resorted to illegal tactics simply to create a controversy that the commissioner caved into." ▼

Teaching Troops About AIDS

By The New York Times

UNITED NATIONS, July 18 — At the urging of the United States, the Security Council has adopted a resolution asking for more attention to education about AIDS to be given to peacekeeping troops, who have been carriers of the disease, especially in Africa. The United Nations has been advising peacekeepers on the dangers of AIDS and promoting the use of condoms, and the resolution reinforces those efforts.

In the vote on Monday, however, the American delegation failed to win a stronger resolution. It would have asked for a data base to be kept on peacekeepers to track national efforts to monitor the infection of the AIDS virus and test troops. Countries supplying troops objected to that proposal as an infringement of their control over military policies.