

# Conservative pulls name from Bush's AIDS panel

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WASHINGTON — A Christian activist chosen by the Bush administration for an AIDS advisory panel withdrew his name yesterday after criticism of his characterization of the disease as the "gay plague."

The administration had asked Jerry Thacker to serve on the Presidential Advisory Commission on HIV and AIDS. He was to be sworn in along with other commission members next week by Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson.

In a letter to Thompson, Thacker, a Pennsylvania marketing consultant, said his statements had been misconstrued but he nonetheless could not accept the appointment.

"I feel I must withdraw my name from consideration to serve at this time due to my and my family's personal concern about my ability to be effective with the council given the current controversy," he wrote.

White House press secretary Ari Fleischer issued a stern rebuke of Thacker's remarks.

"The views that he holds are far, far removed from what the president believes," Fleischer said. "The president has a total opposite view. . . . The president's view is that people with AIDS need to be treated with care, compassion."

Thacker contracted the AIDS virus in 1986 after his wife was infected by a blood transfusion associated with childbirth. Their daughter born of that pregnancy also carries the virus.

That experience led Thacker, a Bob Jones University graduate, to found the Scepter Institute to promote his workshops, books and videos about AIDS.

But the content of his speeches and writings led to severe criticism from gay-rights groups and others when the news of his selection as a White House adviser surfaced.