The Jennings Line

October 20, 2009 By Peter Staley

In case you've avoided listening to the hateful right-wing media machine (basically Limbaugh plus his parrots at FOX) - and who could blame you - they've been orchestrating a disgusting smear campaign against a hero of mine, Kevin Jennings. Kevin was the founder of GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, which has done more to protect gay kids than any group in our history. As soon as President Obama appointed Jennings the Assistant Deputy Secretary for the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, he's had a target on his back from homophobes with microphones.

After they successfully forced out Van Jones, Obama's "green jobs" adviser, the talking heads on right-wing radio and FOX have set their sights on Jennings. They've repeatedly called him a "pervert," and made completely false claims that he's a proponent of statutory rape and a supporter of NAMBLA. These and other malicious smears have been repeatedly debunked, but they just keep saying them day after day, week after week. This past week got even worse, as 53 House Republicans joined the lynch mob.

Thankfully, it looks like Obama is standing by Jennings, for now. But in case any of his advisers (are you listening, Rahm?) are getting cold feet, they should understand this. Kevin Jennings is an unimpeachable hero in the gay rights movement. The work he has done is worthy of sainthood. If Obama fails to fully defend Jennings at any point during this disgusting and probably endless onslaught, then he will cross a line in the sand with the gay community he'd be wise to avoid. We will go from being annoyingly impatient to your worst political nightmare.

Just sayin'.

So thanks for showing some spine during this modern day McCarthyism. Please don't lose it.

And Kevin, we've got your back. I'd imagine these past few weeks must have felt frightening at times, but please know that you are an inspiration for all who fight for justice and equality. Your dignity and courage in the face of hate, both recently and during your life's work, offer an example for how we will ultimately win.

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