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ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
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October 6, 2009

Chairman Eldolphus Towns
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Dennis Kucinich
Subcommittee on Domestic Policy
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Towns and Kucinich:

Since taking office, President Obama has appointed a number of senior Administration advisors, otherwise known as "czars." These appointees, many of whom are not confirmed by the Senate, are responsible for coordinating high-level Administration policy within the Executive Office of the President and across the agencies. While they address a variety of important issues facing Americans, there is considerable confusion surrounding the exact nature of their positions, and the level of decision-making authority granted to them by the President and Department heads. More importantly, the vetting undertaken by this Administration during its hiring processes, as well as the standards it imposes, appear inadequate. In some cases, individuals have displayed troubling behavior that renders them unfit to serve the American people. This is especially true for Safe Schools Czar Kevin Jennings.

On September 15, 2009, the Committee Minority wrote to White House Counsel Greg Craig asking for specific information regarding these czars. The letter requested details regarding the exact nature of their positions, such as job descriptions, policy-making authority, budgetary responsibility, and compensation. It also asked the Administration to explain its hiring process, including what criteria it uses to vet senior-level appointees, the means by which it gathers background material, and which Administration officials, particularly within the Presidential Personnel Office, are responsible at each level of the hiring process. We requested that the White House respond by September 29, 2009, but it has yet to furnish a response.

Since that request, disturbing information about Safe Schools Czar Kevin Jennings has come to light. In his official capacity as Director of the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools at the Department of Education, he is responsible for, among other things, promoting the health and well-being of students across America. Mr. Jennings' past behavior, however, suggests that he is unfit to carry out these duties. For example, while serving as executive director of the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network in 2000, his organization cosponsored a seminar that provided disturbing sexually explicit information to 12 year-old schoolchildren. This callous disregard for America's youth is distressing on a number of levels.

In contravention of the views held by many American families, Mr. Jennings is openly hostile to those who view homosexuality as a matter of religion. In a 2000 speech, he said, "We have to quit being afraid of the religious right. We also have to quit...I'm trying to find a way to say this. I'm trying not to say, '[F---] 'em!' which is what I want to say, because I don't care what they think! Drop dead!" In addition to his open mockery of those he purports to safeguard, he is equally narrow-minded in the classroom. He allows no opposing viewpoints in the classroom to his own ideology. He merely remarks, "there is no 'other side' when you're talking about lesbian, gay, and bisexual students."

In his memoir, Mr. Jennings also describes his past illegal drug abuse. At no point does he express any regret for his actions, recognition of the dangers of illegal drugs, or any cautionary note to young people to avoid drugs. Yet, President Obama has entrusted Mr. Jennings with keeping our schools drug-free.

Perhaps most troubling, Mr. Jennings, while a teacher, failed to protect the safety of a 15 year-old male student when he reported sexual abuse from an older man. It is likely that his failure to report this incident violated the law. This reckless and, perhaps, illegal behavior embodies a disturbing pattern that renders Mr. Jennings unqualified to fulfill the duties of his Presidentially appointed position.

Mr. Jennings' past behavior calls into question not only his fitness to serve the American people, but also the Administration's vetting procedures and standards for his employment. This Committee is duty-bound to investigate these matters in a public forum. We therefore request that you schedule a hearing to examine Mr. Jennings, the details of his employment, the processes by which he was hired, and the personnel responsible for making that decision. If non-confirmed czars are not required to appear before a Senate confirmation panel, then they should, at the very least, appear before this Committee to justify their behavior to the American people.

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Chairman Dennis Kucinich
October 6, 2009
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Thank you for your prompt attention to this very important matter. We look forward to working with you to resolve these matters of transparency and accountability to the American people. If you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at any time. The staff point of contact is Thomas Alexander, Senior Counsel, and he can be reached at 5-5074.

Sincerely,



Darrell Issa
Ranking Member



Jim Jordan
Ranking Member

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