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No room for bigotry in realm of public service 1

It didn't take Jason Gillman long to make a name in local government circles. The self-proclaimed Tea Party activist exposed himself to all as an uninformed bigot, and did so a scant three months after his election to the Grand Traverse County Board of Commissioners.

Gillman chose the occasion of a Jan. 26 official business tour of the county health department to spout his warped views on homosexuality, which he labeled "a perversion."

Gillman's screed included an effort to link gays to pedophilia, a particularly onerous psychiatric disorder in which an adult is attracted to prepubescent children, an affliction that too frequently results in child molestation.

Pedophilia is deviant, blood-curdling, and a criminal offense when children are victimized.

Homosexuality is not a symptom of nor is it a precursor to pedophilia, and county health Director Fred Keeslar said he told Gillman just that. And homosexuality is not a crime — except in various Islamic countries and Montana, if some Republican politicians in that state have their way.

Homosexuals generally are defined as having same-sex attractions; they're likely to be anyone's relative, neighbor, co-worker, best friend. That a politician so easily dismisses gays as perverted criminals defines him to a much greater extent than it does his intended targets.

Gillman, who represents Peninsula Township and portions of Traverse City and East Bay Township, ought to know better, but likely doesn't care. He appears to be among a recent wave of politicians who seem to wear ignorance and prejudice as a badge of honor.

Gillman claims he doesn't "treat anybody any differently because they are gay. But I just don't want to know about it. I don't want to see it, hear it or have it put in front of my face." Yet Gillman had no qualms about launching into a homophobic, self-described "tangent" at the county health department.

In doing so, he worried not a whit about gays who may live in his district, or gay county employees who suddenly find themselves classified as perverted criminals in the mind of an elected official who wields influence over county purse strings.



Or anyone who doesn't view gays through a prism of bigotry and ignorance, for that matter.

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