

ALLSTATE TERMINATES MANAGER OVER HOMOSEXUALITY COLUMN

On own time, man posted anti-'gay' article insurance giant
says didn't reflect its values

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Note from Pastor Kevin Lea:

After reading this article, I regretted that Allstate is not my insurance carrier. Had they been, I would have been able to have the satisfaction of canceling all my policies with them in order to go to a more reputable company.

A former manager with Allstate has sued the insurance giant, alleging the company, which financially supports homosexual advocacy groups, fired him solely because he wrote a column posted on several websites that was critical of same-sex marriage and espoused his Christian beliefs.

J. Matt Barber was a manager in Allstate's Corporate Security Division, its investigative arm, at the Fortune 100 company's headquarters in Northbrook, Ill. Besides working for the insurance provider, Barber was and is a professional heavyweight boxer, a jazz drummer and a Web commentator. His columns have appeared on TheConservativeVoice.com, MensNewsDaily.com and others.



Matt "Bam Bam" Barber. Photo: Chris Cozzone

Though the column in question was written and posted in December, it wasn't until Jan. 31 that Barber was called into a meeting with two

Human Resources officials, one of whom Barber says "slapped down" a printed copy of the column in front of him and asked if he had written it.

Recognizing the piece, Barber confirmed he had written it on his own time, at his home and on his own computer. Barber claims he was told, "Here at Allstate we have a very diverse community."

Barber says the Human Resources assistant vice president told him the column didn't reflect Allstate's view and that he was suspended with pay. Barber was immediately ushered off company grounds - "which was humiliating," the former employee said.

"I explained to Allstate that the article was a reflection of my personal Christian beliefs, and that I had every right to both write it and to have it published," Barber told WND. "I further explained that I had written the article while at home on my own time, that I never mentioned Allstate's name and that I neither directly nor indirectly suggested that Allstate shared my Christian beliefs or my views on same-sex marriage."

Three days later, on Feb. 3, Barber, who had worked for Allstate for five years, says he got a call informing him he was fired "for writing the article," he said. Now, with the help of the Christian Law Association and David Gibbs III, who represented Terri Schiavo's family in the final weeks of her life, Barber is challenging Allstate in federal court.

According to an investigation by the state of Illinois' Department of Employment Security related to Barber's claim for unemployment benefits, an organization - likely a "gay"-rights group - complained to Allstate about the column. But how did the group connect Barber to the insurance company? It turns out one site that posted the column, MensNewsDaily.com, added to the bio line on the article the fact that Barber worked for Allstate.

Barber says he did not include that fact in the original column submission but that the site "disclosed that without my knowledge or consent." According to Barber, he is somewhat well-known in the boxing field in Chicago, and Allstate would sometimes tout the fact that he worked for the company.

The columnist told WND even if he had included a reference to

Allstate in his bio, "I wasn't intimating that I was representing Allstate or that these were the views of Allstate."

Barber stressed to the unemployment office that he did not intend for the affiliation to be included in the bio. Allstate argued to the agency that Barber should not be given unemployment, but upon investigation, the agency agreed with Barber's contention and ruled he was entitled to the money.

Said the agency's report: "The claimant was discharged from Allstate Insurance Company because an outside organization had complained about an article he had written while on his own time."

The state agency also ruled Barber did not engage in misconduct, saying, "The term misconduct means the deliberate and willful violation of a reasonable rule or policy of the employer. ... In this case, the claimant's action which resulted in his discharge was not deliberate and willful."

Homosexuality a violation of 'natural law'

In the commentary piece, which Barber refers to as "the article that got me fired," he makes several arguments against same-sex marriage.

Wrote Barber: "Marriage between one man and one woman, and the nuclear family have forever been cornerstones of civilized society. Regrettably, there are at present, many within the militant homosexual lobby who wish to take a sledge hammer to those cornerstones - many who hope to undermine both the historical and contemporary reality of marriage and family - many who, through judicial fiat, aim to circumvent the Constitution, the legislative process, and the overwhelming will of the people in an effort to redefine marriage. Accordingly, the unsolicited, oxymoronic and spurious expression 'same-sex marriage' has been forced into popular lexicon."

Barber, who holds both a law degree and a masters in public policy, uses anatomy to argue against homosexual behavior.

"For one to believe that homosexual behavior, the act of sodomy in particular, follows the biological order of things," wrote Barber, "one must ignore the fact that sodomy violates natural law - you know ...

wrong plumbing ... square hole/round peg. The whole thing really is a testament to man's creativity. Give us something good, and we'll bend over backwards to twist it into something else."

'Diversity and inclusion'

Barber – known in the boxing world as Matt "Bam Bam" Barber – says Allstate has a decidedly "pro-homosexual" philosophy, requiring employees to undergo "diversity training" and offering domestic partnership benefits.

The training, Barber says, "is really indoctrination hostile toward thousands of employees' Christian beliefs."

The insurance company's foundation has donated money to homosexual-advocacy organizations, including the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and the LAMBDA Legal Defense and Education Fund. A notice about the Allstate foundation says funds are given to "nonprofit organizations that are related to tolerance, diversity and inclusion."

Barber says he hopes consumers who hold traditional values will stop patronizing Allstate.

Addressing those who do, Barber said, "You are helping to support an organization that brazenly and illegally discriminates against religious employees who do not blindly and silently toe the extremist, liberal line on official company policy – policy that is not just overtly pro-homosexual, but is demonstrably anti-family."

Gibbs is the lead attorney on the case.

"To have Fortune 100 companies like Allstate firing people for expressing their sincerely held religious beliefs and even their personal viewpoints on their own time demonstrates just how out of kilter things have gotten," Gibbs told WND.

"Allstate aggressively pushes and promotes the homosexual agenda in the name of tolerance, but the minute someone speaks up with what would be considered the traditional moral-values viewpoint, the tolerance disappears and it results in a termination."

Gibbs rhetorically asked if Allstate would take the same action

against someone who put forth a pro-homosexual viewpoint.

"The answer is absolutely not," he said. "The tolerance is only running one way."

Such discriminatory action violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, Gibbs contends.

Said Gibbs: "The law was intended to make sure people of faith didn't have to leave their religion or viewpoints at the workplace stairs."

Gibbs compared the situation to that of racial discrimination.

"Just like Allstate can't go in and say, 'We've discovered your ethnicity and we're going to fire you,' I don't believe Allstate should be able to go in and say, 'We've discovered your anti-homosexuality viewpoint and we're going to fire you.'"

The complaint claims Barber was "terminated from his employment and discriminated against by Defendants, with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions or privileges of employment because he expressed during non-work hours his sincerely held religious beliefs."

Whistleblower retaliation?

Part of the complaint filed in court discusses a 2003 business trip to Lisbon, Portugal, Barber took to attend the annual Chairman's Conference with hundreds of other Allstate employees.

According to the suit, Barber witnessed on the trip his boss' boss, Ben Tarver, assistant vice president for corporate security, "engaging in various public displays of affection with a young female physician who had been hired by Allstate to serve as the on-call physician for the conference team."

Following Barber's report of the assistant vice president's alleged behavior to his immediate supervisor, the ex-employee says Tarver began harassing him and treating him in an "abusive manner."

Barber eventually filed a sexual harassment/retaliation complaint against Tarver with the Human Resources Department at Allstate.

Barber pointed out the irony of the head of the agency that investigates company-policy violations and fraud allegedly breaking the rules of sexual conduct.

"He was a married man," Barber explained. "It made me very uncomfortable, especially because we investigate sexual harassment."

Barber believes the whistleblower action was a motive in his being fired and that officials were looking for a reason to terminate him. It was the very people to whom he had reported Tarver's alleged misconduct who confronted him about the online article.

'Allstate is very fair'

Marissa Quiles, media relations spokesperson for Allstate, told WND the company could not comment on a lawsuit its lawyers have not yet seen. According to Barber's attorneys, the company was to be served with the suit today.

"Allstate is very fair and has a very good reputation for being inclusive," Quiles said.

"It's the company's policy to maintain a working environment free of any type of discrimination and harassment that may affect an employee's terms or conditions of employment."

Continued Quiles: "We cannot disclose or discuss details related to the former employee's termination, nor can we comment on a lawsuit we have not yet received."

Barber says his termination from Allstate came at a stressful time in his life with his wife just having given birth after a problem pregnancy.

He recently described the situation in a narrative:

To add insult to injury, about two weeks before I was fired, my wife, Sarah, and I delivered our third child in four years following a highly stressful at-risk pregnancy. Allstate was fully aware of our new arrival and that Sarah was still recovering from her C-section surgery when they callously snatched away both our medical insurance and our means of providing for our

young family.

All of this notwithstanding, my personal faith and optimism remain intact. I always knew that people were persecuted in the workplace for their religious beliefs, but I never imagined it would happen to my family and me. We're losing our home, and we may be forced into bankruptcy; but I know that somehow, God will provide. I believe it's crucial to take a stand for truth, even if that stand results in suffering in the short term.

The lawsuit, which was filed May 26, seeks compensatory and punitive damages, as well as attorneys' fees.

An initial status hearing on the federal lawsuit is set for July 5 in the Illinois Northern District Court.