

Maryland rep fires staffer for blogging

(AP) - Rep. Benjamin Cardin has fired a campaign staffer who wrote racially charged comments on an Internet blog against his opponent, Republican Lt. Gov. Michael Steele, who is Black, Cardin's campaign confirmed Saturday.

The blog includes a reference to "Devouring the Competition" by eating Oreo cookies, which Steele has said people threw at him during a 2002 debate as a slight directed at his race and

political views.

In a statement, "anti-Semitic" comments written by the female staffer on her own Internet blog.

"I am deeply offended and disgusted by the blog's racial and anti-Semitic overtones," the 10-term congressional representative said in the statement. "The staff person responsible was promptly dismissed and will have nothing to do with my campaign."

Melissa Sellers, a Steele

spokesperson, sharply criticized the comments on the blog Saturday.

"It is deeply disturbing to learn that a staff member of ten-term Congressman Ben Cardin would keep a blog chronicling racial prejudices toward Lt. Gov. Steele and others," Sellers said. "This is the kind of attitude and gutter politics that Marylanders are sick of and why they are ready for change."

Oren Shur, a Cardin spokesman, said Saturday

that the woman was "a junior staffer" who worked for the campaign about a month. He declined to identify her or elaborate on her duties.

Shur said the woman was fired Friday "as soon as we learned of this."

Some of the comments about Steele on the blog, titled "Road Diaries of the Persuasionatrix," were written in an Aug. 27 posting.

"It's an unfortunate situation when you're running an established, older, White candidate against a dynamic, younger African-American," the staffer wrote. "It's unfortunate, because the racism card hovers constantly, just waiting to be dealt."

In a posting written on Aug. 25, the blog refers to a stack of Oreo cookies "looming in the back of one of the campaign pantries" and how staffers have to "surreptitiously glance around" before eating them.

"The subterfuge would be unnecessary, and snack time would be far less amusing, had an angry citizen not thrown the aforementioned delicious snack food at one of our opponents to comment on his lack of racial loyalty,"

the blog continues.

Steele, who attended a fundraiser near Centerville for Rep. Wayne Gilchrest on Saturday, called the comments "very shocking."

"That it exists in a national campaign is very disappointing," Steele told *The (Easton) Star Democrat*.

Steele has said Oreo cookies were thrown in his direction during a 2002 campaign debate in Baltimore. The incident described by Steele surfaced again in November after another blogger depicted him in minstrel makeup, bringing up issues of race during the campaign as the Republican seeks to become Maryland's first Black senator.

The National Republican Senatorial Committee recruited Steele to run in 2006 for the Senate seat that will become open with the retirement of Democrat Paul Sarbanes. Steele is the first Black person to win statewide office in Maryland.

The Cardin staffer went on to write on her blog that "it would be bad to have the cookies lying around" where people could see them, because of the controversy.

She ends the Aug. 25 entry by writing: "Before I leave, however, I need a picture of all of us holding the forbidden cookies with the caption: 'Devouring the Competition.'"

The blog also contains an Aug. 17 entry in which she asks, "Why am I a Sex Object for Old, Jewish Men?" In it, she wrote that while she likes the candidate she is working for, "I do not, however, like some of my candidate's friends."

Cardin is Jewish. "They are large men with strong, loud voices and Jewish noses," she wrote. "They are also overly friendly."

The writer added: "I'm certainly not one to shy away from physical contact, but when older men I don't know find it ok to squeeze my arm or my shoulder or shake my hand way too long, the toddler in me comes out and wants to hide under the restaurant table or in the closet behind the coats."

She continued: "Some of the guys who have been with my candidate for years are like that. They don't mean anything by it; it's just the way they are. I wish that made it less uncomfortable."

CDC: Vaccine gap gone

ATLANTA (AP) - For the first time in at least a decade, the vaccination rate for Black children in the United States has caught up to that of youngsters in other racial groups, the government reported Thursday.

"This is an important milestone. It shows you that racial and ethnic differences can be eliminated" in health care, said Dr. Walter Orenstein, an Emory University vaccination expert.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that a survey found no statistically significant difference in 2005 among Blacks, Whites, Asians and Hispanics in vaccination rates for children ages 19 months to 35 months.

In each racial group, about 76 percent to 79 percent of children received the entire recommended series of shots against whooping cough, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, measles, mumps, rubella,

chickenpox, hepatitis B and Haemophilus influenza type B.

Blacks have lagged behind Whites by as many as 10 percentage points in the past decade, said Dr. Anne Schuchat, director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases.

In decades past, when the government had recommended fewer immunizations, vaccination rates for different racial groups at times were roughly equal, Schuchat said.

But, disparities became clear during measles outbreaks in the late 1980s and early '90s. New public health efforts were started to close the gap, including the creation of the government's Vaccines for Children program in 1994, which pays for immunizations for the poor.

The overall numbers in the new report indicate public health officials still have

work to do, said Dr. Neal Halsey, director of John Hopkins University's Institute for Vaccine Safety.

"Seventy-six percent is good, but it's not great. We still have a quarter of the children in this country not getting all the recommended vaccines in a timely manner," Halsey said.

The study was based on an annual random-digit-dialed telephone survey with a response rate of 65 percent. Researchers also reviewed vaccination records for about 17,500 children from households that took part in the survey.

Researchers found wide geographic variations. Massachusetts had the highest vaccination rate, about 91 percent. Vermont had the lowest, 63 percent.

But, racial gaps, which have been narrowing significantly in the past five or six years, seem to have closed, (See Gap, Page 14)

Race

(Continued from Page 5) ping had taken place in New Hampshire. The sworn affidavit said Katelyn described talking cordially with her parents during the trip from Maine.

Salem Police prosecutor Ryan McFarland said in court Monday the Kampfs had their passports, rope, a rifle and ammunition in the car. He argued they posed a danger if released and could flee the country.

Dion said Katelyn Kampf told him her parents got upset when she called them last Thursday night and told them she was pregnant. The Kampfs had met her boyfriend before and been friendly, but the pregnancy apparently "changed the dynamic," he said.

Katelyn Kampf said her mother "kept referring to the

baby as a thing, as 'it,' and there were other comments made," he said.

They invited Katelyn, who is living in Portland with her boyfriend's mother, Peggy Johnson, to come to their house last Friday morning. Dion would not say whether the Kampfs were already prepared to abduct their daughter when she arrived.

In a court affidavit, Salem Police Officer Sean Marino wrote that Katelyn told him her parents "chased her out into the yard, grabbed and tied her hands and feet together."

Her father carried her to the car and they headed to New Hampshire, he wrote.

Katelyn Kampf escaped from her parents in Salem after persuading them to untie her so she could use a


Kmart bathroom, police said. After her father went into the men's room, she ran to a nearby Staples store and used her father's cell phone, which she had swiped, to call 911, police said.

The boyfriend, 22-year-old Reme Johnson, last week began serving a 6-month sentence for theft at the Androscoggin County Jail in Auburn, Maine. He also has previous felony convictions for burglary and receiving stolen property, the *Portland Press Herald* reported.

Authorities in Maine said the parents apparently thought that, in light of their daughter's stage of pregnancy and the different abortion laws in each state, the abortion should be performed in New York. It was unclear how many weeks pregnant she was.


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