

The Track Record on the Bush Administration on HIV/AIDS

A report card: July 2003

While President Bush has garnered attention for his global AIDS initiative, his record on domestic HIV/AIDS programs is nowhere nearly as “compassionately conservative.” Bush is even blocking full funding for his global initiative; though authorized at \$3 billion for FY 2004, President Bush only requested \$2 billion, cutting \$1 billion for the Global Fund, which is up and running and saving lives now. The rest of the record is even bleaker:

Bush Budgets: White House Proposes Flat Funding for HIV Programs For Three Consecutive Years

The Bush White House requested flat funding for domestic HIV care, treatment and prevention programs for fiscal years 2002 and 2003, and net cuts in FY 2004. Sources have said the White House FY 2005 budget will once again request flat funding for domestic HIV/AIDS programs.

CDC Develops Controversial New HIV Prevention Initiative

In April 2003, the CDC announced its Advancing HIV Prevention initiative, essentially abandoning primary prevention efforts aimed at keeping HIV-negative people uninfected. Instead, this program will identify and target HIV-positive people through massive HIV-testing campaigns, and then provide prevention case management to keep HIV-positive people from further transmitting HIV. The funding for these new activities comes at the expense of traditional HIV prevention, and is part-and-parcel of the Bush Administration’s antipathy toward honest discussions of sex and drug use. The initiative also risks further stigmatizing people with HIV/AIDS.

Attacking Medicaid

The Bush Administration proposed radical changes to the structure of Medicaid, transforming it from an entitlement program into a block grant. This could mean thousands of people with HIV/AIDS losing eligibility as “optional” coverage decreases. Fortunately, grassroots lobbying has halted the momentum for this proposal, but the President’s intention to cut back on Medicaid looms.

Just Say No: Administration Pushes for Abstinence-Only Sex Education

The Bush Administration is on a moral mission to remove comprehensive sex education from classrooms and replace it with programs that deem abstinence to be the single way to prevent HIV, unplanned pregnancy and STDs. Bush has been frequently quoted saying, “Abstinence works 100% of the time.” The Administration’s stated goal is for abstinence programs to achieve “parity” with comprehensive sex education.

Despite Budget Deficits, White House Requests Exponential Increase For Abstinence-Only Programs

The Bush budget has called for reauthorization of the \$50 million spent annually on abstinence-only education programs under welfare reform (TANF). The president’s budget has also proposed an increase from \$40 million to \$73 million (a 66 percent increase) for SPRANS-CBAE (Special Projects of Regional and National Significance—Community Based Abstinence Education). Comprehensive sexual education programs have no corresponding streams of funding.

April, 2001: White House Announces It Will Close Office of National AIDS Policy

The Bush Administration, in April 2001, announced it would close the Office of National AIDS Policy, which was established during the early years of the Clinton Administration to provide policy guidance and leadership on HIV/AIDS. The Bush White House reversed its decision only after backlash from AIDS community advocates.

President Bush Stacks HIV Health Positions with Anti-Prevention Appointees

President Bush has stacked key health positions with conservative appointees hostile to proven prevention methods, including:

Claude Allen, Deputy Secretary of HHS: In May 2001, the senate confirmed Allen to be the HHS Deputy Secretary. Allen has gone on record saying that when federally funded abstinence-only education programs are mixed with religious messages “well, those things happen.”

Wade Horn, Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, HHS: Horn once called for welfare to be prioritized to married couples, and has demonized single parents and GLBT families. Horn believes abstinence-only-until-marriage education is the key to HIV prevention, coupled with expecting all Americans to conform to heterosexual, monogamous marriages.

Patricia Ware, former Executive Director of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA), now a special assistant in the Department of Health and Human Services: Ms. Ware is one of the strongest advocates of abstinence-only education in the Bush Administration.

Sapping Up Research Funds

In May 2003, the Office of Management and Budget told NIAID that it would be forced to shift more than \$200 million in research funds to Anthrax vaccine procurement. A large portion of this money could come from HIV/AIDS research, despite the President’s funding expansion for an entirely new Department of Homeland Security.

Censoring the NIH

NIH researchers report that new political pressure exists within the agency to avoid research proposals that use terms such as “sex workers” or “men who have sex with men,” for fear of higher-ups cutting off funding. By politicizing science and threatening funding cuts, the Administration is tamping down any research efforts that stand in the way of its ideological agenda.

Administration Disavows Surgeon General Report

The U.S. Surgeon General’s Office in June 2001 released a report on sexuality that endorsed comprehensive sex education that promotes abstinence but also permits distribution of condoms and other forms of contraception. The White House swiftly dismissed the report and said it “doesn’t reflect the values” of the Bush Administration.

Undermining Condom Effectiveness

In the summer of 2001, the NIH released a report designed to undermine confidence in the effectiveness of condoms in preventing STDs and HIV. Simultaneously, CDC was instructed to remove all references to condom effectiveness from its website.

Censoring the CDC: DHHS Discontinues Programs That Work

Summer 2002, the CDC Division of Adolescent Health was forced to discontinue “Programs that Work” a compilation of scientifically proven programs that focused on STD, HIV and pregnancy prevention for adolescents because comprehensive sex education programs were among those listed.

Prevention is Objectionable

Spring 2002, CDC is forced to require all recipients of CDC funds to put a disclaimer on their websites warning that they may contain objectionable material—whether or not the websites are used for prevention messages.

AUDITS, AUDITS, AUDITS: Administration Looks at Books, Programs and Science

Under direction from the Bush Administration, DHHS agencies that administer HIV/AIDS prevention and care programs—particularly CDC—are being audited. In addition, recipients of CDC and HRSA funds are undergoing financial, program and scientific audits. All indications are that the audits will expand.

New CDC Head Julie Gerberding's First Course of Business on HIV/AIDS

Less than a month after being appointed to head the CDC, physician Julie Gerberding, responding to a congressional inquiry, sent a third set of auditors to the STOP AIDS Project in San Francisco to evaluate the scientific validity of its targeted HIV prevention programs. Stop AIDS is a CBO that conducts prevention activities for men who have sex with men. Since taking office, Bush Administration officials, under direction from ultra-conservative right wing Members of Congress, have virtually camped out at the STOP AIDS Project, auditing its finances and programming constantly.

Bush Denies Funding To International Fund Providing Sex Education and HIV testing to Women In Developing Countries

In July 2002, President Bush announced he would deny \$34 million to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). UNFPA programs are frequently the only sex education that poor women in developing countries receive. UNFPA also funding life saving HIV testing efforts. This money has been nixed again for FY 2004.

Global Gag Rule

While the international HIV/AIDS initiative was being developed, the White House had threatened to include a "global gag rule," preventing organizations that received money from the U.S. government from being able to counsel or perform abortions, even though such services would have been funded separately.

International HIV/AIDS and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Though President Bush has taken some first steps at responding to the fight against global AIDS, developing legislation to treat and prevent HIV/AIDS globally, his own budget proposal under-funded the initiative by \$1 billion in FY 2004, and contains only paltry sums for the Global Fund.

This pattern is entirely consistent with previous years. For example, in May 2002, Sens. Bill Frist, R-Tenn., and Jesse Helms, R-N.C., proposed legislation that would provide \$500 million to the Global Fund. Under pressure from the Bush Administration, the senators reduced that contribution to \$200 million.

The Global Fund is the only multilateral initiative up and running now, paying for life saving HIV treatment and care--unlike the go-it-alone Bush initiative, which will take years to show results.

June 2003: AIDS Community Has Had Enough

In June 2003, more than 150 local, regional, and national organizations and individuals sent a letter to the White House protesting Administration policies on HIV/AIDS, and demanding that President Bush take politics out of HIV. Through this letter, these communities put President Bush on notice that his policies are under scrutiny and he will be held accountable for the Administration's failure to care for people with HIV and prevent new infections.