

# Editor's Letter

April 1, 2001 By [Walter Armstrong](#)

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"The government and private agencies have created a vast labyrinth of AIDS service organizations. They offer support groups and condoms but cannot conceal the ugly fact that the system has little to give us: There is no cure and few effective treatments. Fact is, the system has a lot invested in keeping the industry growing: It keeps critics at bay, creates the illusion that they care and reaps huge profits for them. The feds have got those of us working in AIDS thinking we're combating the epidemic and saving lives. But really we work hard so men in power don't look so evil as they pick us off one by one."

*The system. The men in power. They.* Today the rhetoric sticks in my throat, the rage and despair lost to memory. Once there was a crisis, and a dying generation, and inflammatory words and deeds. Now AIDS is just another global disaster -- routine, boring, business as usual -- literally a billion-dollar industry propped up by institutions and corporations whose main goal is, no matter how well-intentioned the individuals who run them, self-perpetuation. Sometimes the survival of people with HIV also results, like a side effect.

"Eliminate the need for your services by fighting the system that perpetuates them." This we failed to do. This issue of *POZ* is about what we did instead: built an industry. "The Biz of AIDS" is a large and ambitious subject, and much of our coverage is small and practical: recipes from HIVers on an SSDI budget for making chicken salad out of chickenshit ("Living Large on Small Change"), and steps to take in climbing out of debt ("Money Pit"). But in "Conflicts in Pharmaland," PWA Frank Pizzoli takes on one of the system's central errors: how the need for profits -- not the needs of people -- drives drug companies' R&D priorities. From the high concept (investing in surefire protease knockoffs rather than big-risk new anti-HIV approaches) to the low road (companies not sharing drugs for studies of real-world combos), competition has proved to be no fast track to better, safer treatments, let alone a cure. Still, if there's any truth to the old ACT UP saw "We are all living with AIDS," after two bloody decades we should be grownup enough to understand that from the CEO in Glaxo's tower to the homeless PWA at Housing Works' door, we all also share one world, one system. Without Big Pharma we would have no drugs at all.

And no *POZ*. Turn to page 48, and you'll notice it's the last in the magazine; while not exactly the incredible shrinking woman, we're half the size we were two years ago. This cutback, due to fewer drug ads, reflects the general downward trends in AIDS -- some, such as fewer deaths, to be thankful for; most, especially less money, media and activism, not. The only reason this bears noting is that every day brings more bad news for HIVers from the Bush administration. Today the AIDS czar was axed; by the time you read this, more serious damage will undoubtedly be done. So

just as the AIDS community battles with demon downsizing, a more dangerous foe -- the PWA-hating right wing -- has seized power. Welcome to harder times. Instead of sitting here with this old leaflet's wrinkled rage and despair, I should join those running from door to door crying, "A crisis is coming, a crisis is coming..." Well, if we're smaller now, we'll get leaner and meaner. If we're grownup, we'll get it right this time. The crisis is here.

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