Mailbox

February 1, 2003

At The End of Their Rope

Congratulations on the excellent article on the president's AIDS advisory council ["Dangerous Council," November 2002]. People really need to know that this is going on. On a "behind the scenes" level, I'm aware of other activities engaged in by some of the people described in the article's sidebar ["New Enemies List..."]. They are literally sabotaging efforts by more moderate forces in the Bush administration to find common ground with experienced AIDS workers and agencies. On the plus side, each time this happens and we can shine a light on it, it ever so slightly disempowers the radicals on the right. Still, others may argue that we should just let the extreme right wing take all the rope they want so we can hang them with it later.

-- Martin Delaney
Founding Director of Project Inform
San Francisco

After reading "Dangerous Council" by Esther Kaplan, I have to wonder why no one is challenging these folks in court. It seems to me that with America's litigious culture, every time a politician gives a religious speech or reasons that he is doing God's work, there would be lawyers circling and activists chanting "Separation of God and State!" Instead, we have a "born-again" president leading a parade of religious zealots down a path of AIDS ignorance that will surely result in a health crisis far worse than anything we can imagine. And he's getting away with it!

Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, Sr. had bloodstained hands. Dubya has a bloodstained soul! It's déjà vu all over again. How many more are going to have to die? Class action lawsuit, anyone?

-- Frank DeNinis
Via the Internet

At the time of the last presidential election, I'm sure it felt fine to have a viable third-party candidate to vote for in Ralph Nader. But the truth remains that most votes for Nader were votes taken away from Gore, and we all know how close the margin of victory was for George Bush. We now have a government for and by the religious and far right -- for most readers of *POZ* (even, I would hope, Log Cabin Republicans), our worst nightmare come true.

This is what we have brought upon ourselves. And unless a miracle occurs, we have six more years of this disgusting injustice to face. The HIV and gay communites are a larger voting bloc

than even we realize. We have the power to turn elections, and we are pissing away the progress that it has taken us decades to achieve. Does anybody care?

-- Thom Heinrichs
Long Beach, California

“Dangerous Council” was certainly passionate, if not complete (I gave up hope long ago that *POZ* would insist on balance). We all can agree that HIV prevention has become complex. Indeed, the recent failure of our communities’ own simple solution of “wear a condom every time” has proved that slogans are not sufficient. But certainly there is a place for abstinence and support of long-term, monogamous relationships in whatever the right solution for HIV prevention turns out to be. We should use the energy that is now directed toward denouncing all things abstinence to find creative ways to include the abstinence message in prevention campaigns.

It is easier to attack and destroy than to engage and build. It is also fashionable to demonize Republicans and the Bush administration. But Democrats are also uncomfortable with these issues. The Clinton administration would not allow needle exchange. And here, in supposedly liberal Massachusetts, the overwhelmingly Democratic legislature banned the discussion of sex in any state program designed to make communities healthier and safer for gay and lesbian youth. We must stop playing party politics with HIV.

-- Chris Ferguson
Boston

Cat Hullabaloo

Because I’ve been HIV positive since 1983, research for a cure or better treatments for AIDS is certainly something I support ["Faster, Pussycat! Die! Die!“ November 2002]. However, animal experiments are no way to accomplish this. Infecting cats with FIV and crudely measuring their neurological dysfunction is not a suitable ”model" for studying drug users with HIV. By studying humans already in this affected group, researchers could accurately measure language deficits, subtle learning problems or other neurological effects.

HIV and drug addiction are pressing public health problems needing attention from ethical, capable researchers. Subjecting domestic cats to a virus that is markedly different from HIV, in a setting far different from the human experience, will only produce results that lead us astray. I hope Ohio State University drops these experiments for good.

-- James Brown
Venice, California

Prison Blues

"Prison Plus" [November 2002] briefly chronicled a chilling reality of prison existence: rape. However, the most damaging effect of prison life on inmates -- especially gay, transgender and HIV positive inmates -- is the abandonment by our peers outside. I’ve been in prison since 1998. There’s no way to portray the kind of treatment HIVers behind bars receive in their final days, or

the years of silent screams of gay and positive inmates who remain friendless, forgotten and frustrated with life! It's one thing to report on physical abuses in prison. Reporting on the emotional abuses created by ostracism and betrayal, however, has been neglected.

How can we help but to sing the blues?

-- Phillip Carter
Mississippi Dept. of Corrections
Parchman, Mississippi

Correction: *On the cover of the December 2002 issue,* POZ *incorrectly stated that Dawn Averitt's daughter, Maddy, was born on June 8. She was actually born on June 28. Mazel tov! -- and we regret the error.*

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