Mbeki’s 180

July 1, 2002 By Cindra Feuer

An AIDS policy turnaround by the beleagured African National Congress (ANC) was made in April as President Thabo Mbeki both announced universal access to nevirapine for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission and reversed the ban on hospitals offering post-exposure prophylaxis to rape survivors.

Mbeki’s famous questioning of HIV as the cause of AIDS, and his rants against HAART as poison, won him wingnut status on the international stage. What finally edged Mbeki to his senses? While it’s true that activists in the Treatment Action Campaign linked arms with labor for a grassroots push, that heroes Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu harshly prodded the prez and that the courts repeatedly undermined his resistance to nevirapine, if you want to find the real cause of his change of heart, some say, just follow the money.

In June, five African nations joined in a partnership with the G-8 Summit -- and exchanged promises of peace, democracy and good government for Western investment. This deal is likely what pirouetted President Mbeki 180 degrees. “It’s based on economics rather than a fundamental understanding of AIDS,” said Kevin Osborne, African AIDS policy expert. “But our hope is that it will translate into programs.”

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