Reed Represents

Phil Reed on not being New York City's openly gay, HIV positive city council member

July 1, 2002 By James Dale

Last Featured in *POZ* March 1998

I'm like a dinosaur -- more than 20 years with this virus. I have to monitor my health carefully, but so far, so good. The bone-marrow cancer seems to be in check, and I've stayed on the same HIV meds for years -- Fortovase, Epivir, Zerit. When I hear about people having problems with drug resistance, I just count my blessings.

I faced a very difficult campaign for re-election, but I won because of my record. In the health arena, we built more than 4,000 new units of affordable housing in East Harlem and 150 units for PWAs. We targeted asthma and saw a dramatic decrease in the hospitalization rate for children. We passed a domestic-partnership bill and a transgender-rights bill. Those are some fairly substantial achievements.

September 11 was Election Day, and we suddenly went from getting out the vote to organizing a blood drive. All these people were streaming up from downtown Manhattan, so I put my campaign troops to work. When we were out on the street asking people to give blood, this one guy looked me right in the face and said, "I certainly wouldn't want to get *your* blood." That sent a cold chill up my spine.

From Giuliani to Bloomberg, it's a completely different world. The irony is that we had a mayor for eight years who didn't want to do anything we felt should be done on a social or human level, and there was money. And now we have a mayor who wants to get things done, and there isn't money. We finally got $5 million in HIV prevention targeted to people of color last year. This year we may not get any of that.

Sometimes I go places socially, and I laugh because my friends are like, "This is Councilman Reed." On a Saturday night I'm not sure I need to be introduced as "Councilman Reed." Why don't we just start with "Philip"? One thing I've learned in this business is that when I want to be naughty or when I just want to not be "the Councilman," the best thing is to get out of town.

Sometimes I see my name in the paper as "the openly gay, HIV positive councilman" and I wonder what that's all about. In the context of Medicare or job development, why should

I be billed that way? I mean, you have that as a badge to wear, that you're HIV positive. Now, what the hell else are you doing with your life? Do you have a good job? Are you happy? At some point it's like, "Honey, *please*. Yes, I'm doing OK. So what's for dinner?"

I think I look pretty good for 53. Not shopworn. But I'm a grown man. I'm not 20, and I don't have a problem with that. I see myself as a role model for those of us who have survived.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Reed-Represents-941-7225