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Lead, follow or get out of the way

August 1, 1994 By Sean Strub

On June 11, soft-spoken, longtime activist Mario Cooper assumed the chairmanship of the AIDS Action Council, the national lobbying organization. Within 48 hours in this new position, Cooper informed the White House that they had less than 30 days to “do something about Gebbie” (Kristine Gebbie, the so-called AIDS czar) before AIDS Action Council and its members nationwide would join ACT UP/DC and the National Association of People With AIDS in calling for her immediate dismissal.

This time, the White House got the message and *POZ* learned at press time that Gebbie -- having failed to get out of the way -- is now gone. Her “leadership” will be nothing more than another sad chapter in the history of the AIDS pandemic.

Cooper’s leadership, however, may well be a happier chapter. He gets the issue, commands respect across the spectrum of activists and has extraordinary access to the highest levels of government (he managed the highly-successful 1992 Democratic National Convention). Cooper exemplifies the type of person we were looking for in the *POZ* 50. Selecting the *POZ* 50 AIDS policy leaders was an informal (and difficult) process involving the input of dozens of activists, researchers, government officials and others.

Definitions of influence and leadership differ. We omitted people who could influence the debate, but do not. We avoided including individuals because of an elected or appointed position they held, unless they were truly playing a role in determining AIDS policy. We sought to include the people who exercised their power and influence.

As a footnote to the Gebbie story, there was near unanimity among people we consulted that Kristine Gebbie should not be on the *POZ* 50 list. The board chairperson of one AIDS research organization told me: “Including her work would totally invalidate the credibility of this project. She is a laughing stock and not taken seriously by anyone working in AIDS whose judgment I respect.” Similar comments were offered by others.

Kristine Gebbie may be a nice person, but she was a lousy leader. Good riddance.

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