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Hollow words from a cowardly President.

December 1, 1994 By Sean Strub

On Friday, October 21, *The Wall Street Journal* ran a moving front-page story about Pedro Zamora's battle against AIDS. The Journal article, by Eric Morgenthaler, eloquently reported Pedro's last days and the profound impact of his activism.

Morgenthaler wrote about President Clinton's calling Pedro and quoted Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala saying "I love Pedro." That made me angry. With as little as this administration has done on AIDS, the President and Secretary Shalala's words and actions seem empty, if not calculating. If President Clinton cared so much about Pedro's welfare, he would talk about AIDS to the public, not just to Pedro on his deathbed. He would implement the 30 recommendations of President Bush's AIDS Commission. If he cared, he would appoint his own commission before any more of the proposed members die before being appointed and appoint an effective and aggressive AIDS czar.

If he cared, he would meet his campaign pledge "AIDS will be my passion" instead of assigning AIDS to the list of issues that were once important to him but he has now run away from. In two years in office, Clinton has participated in two AIDS events and barely mentioned the word in public.

If Shalala really "loves Pedro" as she claims, she will kick some butt at the FDA, CDC and NIH -- all agencies under supervision -- to cut the red tape, expedite new treatments, dramatically increase anonymous testing, re-empower the Office on Alternative Health and increase funding for prevention and care. But this administration's priority is all about image and media -- illustrating their compassion on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* is more important than real policy initiatives. As I write this, they are cynically trying to have a press flurry of pseudo-action prior to World AIDS Day on December 1. It turns my stomach.

Last year's gays in the military debacle made the administration skittish about political issues or initiatives with any connection to the gay community. Presidential advisers such as Carol Rasco, Rahm Emmanuel, Mandy Grunwald, Harold Ickes, Stan Greenberg and Phil Lader have proven themselves to be enemies of people with AIDS because of their aggressive insistence that the White House stay away from any gay or AIDS-related issues. They believe that the President always loses politically when he does anything AIDS- or gay-related. Devoid of genuine

commitment to fight AIDS, these pirahnas of politics have successfully promoted a campaign of inaction.

Congressman Barney Frank says that Americans are not nearly as homophobic as they think they are supposed to be. I wish the White House would figure out that the American public isn't nearly as AIDS-pbobic as the President's pollsters and advisers believe it to be, either.

As the election dust settles, I am reminded of 1992's election which seemed to hold so much promise for the AIDS-affected. The philosopher Seneca once observed, "Time discovers truth." The truth that time has discovered is the hollowness of the Clinton administration's pledge to deal effectively with AIDS. As a candidate, Bill Clinton claimed to "feel our pain." As a president, he has done precious little to marshal resources to help heal our pain. No matter what else he may accomplish in office, history will record Clinton's tenure as yet another in a lengthening line of Presidents willing to write off people with AIDS.

After all, dead people don't vote. Or do they?

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