Virtual Activism

Couch potatoes unite to fight AIDS

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Activism lite? Don’t bother getting off your butt, just flick on your computer. On World AIDS Day 1997, the AIDS Action Council booted up the “Until It’s Over e-March” -- the first-ever electronic march on Washington. The lobbyists plan to forward hundreds of messages to the nation’s leaders during the yearlong march. “It’s like people taking a felt marker and making their own sign,” said executive director Daniel Zingale. “As soon as you select or write a message and press ’send,’ it goes to the president, Newt Gingrich, everybody.” After logging on, marchers are presented with a virtual image of the Washington Mall, and can either choose a prewritten message or create their own e-sign, which is sent immediately to the bigwigs. There is no screening process for personal messages, and so far only one hate bulletin -- the usual “people with AIDS deserve to die” -- has been dispatched.

Zingale estimated that the site will get at least 10,000 hits in its first year. He said that in just one day Vice President Al Gore got about 100 AIDS-related messages. The current theme -- “AIDS is not over” -- is meant to wake up Washington. “My hope is that by World AIDS Day 1998, Washington decision-makers will understand that America is not complacent about AIDS,” Zingale said. The page’s theme will change with current events and is likely to cover such issues as needle exchange and Medicaid research. Users can register opinions in online surveys and hear guest speakers via video link, including AIDS czar Sandra Thurman and former POZ cover folk Hydeia Broadbent, Mary Fisher and Magic Johnson. “At year-end, we take stock and decide where to go from there,” Zingale said. “It may be time to do something entirely new.” Just sit there and click http://web.archive.org/web/20000817182824/http://www.aidsaction.org/.

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