The “Absolute Charade” of Pence’s World AIDS Day Address [VIDEO]

For the second year, the White House ignores the group of Americans most affected by HIV. And that’s not the only omission.

November 30, 2018 By Trent Straube

Vice President Mike Pence addressed the nation with remarks in honor of World AIDS Day, held each December 1. To the uneducated observer, his speech at the White House event may have seemed appropriately sincere, even hopeful, with a bit of news to report: the Trump administration will invest an extra $100 million in specific AIDS-related causes (more on this later).

But POZ readers are not ignorant on the subject of HIV. Nor are the very informed folks at, say, Lambda Legal and the Human Rights Campaign, two groups that advocate for LGBT and HIV causes. Here’s what they had to say about the event:

> VP Pence addressing the nation to mark #WorldAIDSDay is an absolute charade. This administration has done more to turn back the clock on access to health care than any in recent history. But go on, tell us about how you really care about people living with #HIV/AIDS, Mike Pence. pic.twitter.com/vwPymda3OD
>
> — Lambda Legal (@LambdaLegal) November 29, 2018

Mike Pence, who has spent his career denying people access to HIV prevention & treatment, delivered remarks at a World AIDS Day event today.

Pence failed to mention the LGBTQ community- the group most affected by the crisis in the U.S.

https://t.co/hdaWeVtYGd

— Human Rights Campaign (@HRC) November 30, 2018

What did Pence say at the podium as we mark the 30th anniversary of World AIDS Day? You can watch the entire speech in the video atop this article, and you can read it on WhiteHouse.gov. Two of his main discussion points were praising the role of faith-based organizations in the global fight against the epidemic and ensuring everyone that President Trump is committed to the HIV cause. Here's an edited section of the speech:

> "We are closer today than ever before to ending the AIDS crisis in our time. It's true. Now, the credit for this achievement is widely shared, but faith-based organizations and faith communities like those represented here have played a preeminent role. And the leaders in this room have inspired countless others to put hands and feet on their faith and bring hope and healing to literally millions of people around the world suffering with HIV/AIDS.…
>
> "That's why, today, I'm pleased to announce that our administration will invest $100 million in new resources to expand our engagement with faith-based organizations and communities of faith that are on the frontlines of the fight against HIV/AIDS.
>
> "This new investment of $100 million in faith-based organizations will increase…the funding to those organizations by a full third. And this will make a world of difference, we believe, in countless lives affected by this disease.
>
> "The truth is that this is a sound investment because faith-based organizations, like those in this room and so many others around the world, have been the cornerstone of PEPFAR's success."

Pence is referring to the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which George W. Bush started in 2003 and has sent more than $80 billion in HIV funding to Africa. Pence continued:

> "President Trump believes [the reauthorization of PEPFAR] is a critical component of our administration's commitment to combat AIDS. And it will build on the renewed energy and focus that the president has brought, and our entire administration have brought to this critical issue.
>
> "In fact, last year, our administration published the first-ever 'Strategy for Accelerating HIV/AIDS Epidemic Control,' which lays out President Trump's vision and plan to end the AIDS epidemic as we know it."

These snippets of the speech sound commendable, right? But then think of what was not mentioned: LGBT people, who happen to make up the majority of HIV cases in the United States. Of note, this marks the second year in a row the White House has not mentioned gay people in its World AIDS Day address. Also missing: African Americans and the U.S. South, which is now ground zero of our national epidemic.

Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with praising and supporting faith-based initiatives. Many have done great work over the years. (It is no secret that Pence is a conservative Christian.) The problem arises when religious beliefs take precedence over scientific evidence and proven interventions—for example when AIDS groups lose funding if they don't denounce LGBT people or premarital sex. For just one instance of how this plays out in PEPFAR in real life, read "Trump Expands 'Global Gag Rule' on Abortion, Affecting $8.8B in Health Funding." That POZ article points out that foreign groups, including AIDS organizations, that even discuss abortion as a form of family planning will not receive U.S. money.

Then there's the fact that the Trump administration has made great effort to slash global HIV funding. It has attempted numerous times to maim the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid (which is how many Americans with HIV get their health care). Trump has recently proposed a military policy that will effectively discharge service members living with HIV. Oh, and he fired and has yet to replace all members of the President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS, known as PACHA.

Below are just a few POZ headlines from the past two years, to give context to Pence's speech:

- "What Do AIDS Groups Say About Trump's 2019 Budget Proposal? Hint: I would slash HIV funds by over $100 million nationally and cause 300,000 death each year globally."

- "Trump Fires All Members of HIV/AIDS Advisory Council: The termination by FedEx letter happens after six other PACHA members resigned in protest in June."

- "Trump Administration Policies Undermine the Global HIV Response: An open letter by more

than 200 HIV scientists, researcher and clinicians denouncing the deterioration of U.S. evidence-based policymaking."

- "Mike Pence's Delayed Response to HIV Outbreak in Indiana Had Grave Results: Many of the 215 injection-drug-related HIV infections could have been averted"

- "Sergeant With HIV Sues Defense Department Over 'Archaic' Policies: He's not allowed to serve as an officer and he can't be deployed. Under Trump's new policy, that could get him discharged."

And in case you're not up to speed on Pence's record on HIV-related issues, HRC created a video to enlighten you. Watch it above, or read the POZ article about it "Mike Pence Has a 'Dangerous' Record on HIV/AIDS Issues."

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/absolute-charade-pences-world-aids-day-address-video