# AG Nominee William Barr's Record Shows "Disturbing Views" About HIV

His earlier stint as attorney general included holding immigrants in an "HIV concentration camp." Then there are his views on LGBT people.

January 15, 2019 By Trent Straube

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As Trump's nominee for attorney general testifies at his confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, most reports focus on one topic: Whether Barr will opt to protect the Mueller investigation or the president's power. But there's much more to consider, including Barr's record on LGBT people and people living with HIV.

It's not like information about Barr is hard to find. From 1991 to 1993, he was the U.S. attorney general under George H.W. Bush. During this time, reports The Daily Beast, Barr created "the world's first detention camp for refugees with HIV."

Here's some backstory: After a military coup in Haiti in 1991, hundreds of thousands of people fled. They crowded onto boats headed to the United States, where they planned to seek asylum. These so-called boat people were detained at a U.S. naval base in Cuba called Guantanamo Bay. Because it wasn't technically part of the United States, the laws governing the base were murky, which led to immigrants being stripped of their rights and detained indefinitely.

At one point, they were forced to be tested for HIV (a positive result meant they were not allowed entry to the United States per federal law; this was also before effective HIV treatment became available). Under Barr's guidance, the 310 Haitians who tested HIV positive were held indefinitely at Guantanamo's Camp Bulkely.

The Haitian HIV crisis at Guantanamo Bay finally ended in 1993 when a district court judge, under newly elected Bill Clinton, ruled that the detention violated constitutional due process. The detainees were allowed into the United States, but, as the Daily Beast points out, the crisis set the stage for detaining so-called terrorists at Guantanamo Bay after 9/11 and detaining immigrants today on U.S. soil.

"Barr's embrace and continued defense of concentration camps for HIV-positive Haitian asylum seekers, as well as his leading role in fighting to ban immigrants living with HIV from entering the country, is appalling," Aaron C. Morris, executive director of Immigration Equality, which advocates for LGBT and HIV-positive people in the immigration system, told the Daily Beast. "Immigrants

living with HIV deserve an attorney general who cares about their well-being and respects their human rights," Morris said. "William Barr has yet to demonstrate that he is interested in doing either."

Be sure to read the Daily Beast article for more history on the HIV and Haitian crisis.

But this isn't the only troubling HIV-related episode in Barr's past. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), a national advocacy group for the LGBT community, issued a call for senators to question Barr about his "troubling record."

"Mr. Barr's public record indicates deeply disturbing views toward LGBTQ people and people living with HIV that are out of step with the values of the American people," said HRC government affairs director David Stacy in the statement. "From his legal positions around HIV/AIDS during his tenure as attorney general to his more recent writing promoting extreme views around religious exemptions, William Barr is ill suited to be our country's top law enforcement officer. LGBTQ Americans and people living with HIV must have an attorney general who understands their lives, their experience and their health care needs. We urge Senators to use this hearing to thoroughly address whether Barr plans to continue the administration's attacks on the civil rights of LGBTQ people. And ultimately, the Senate must not confirm any nominee who will not treat all Americans equally and with the dignity and fairness they deserve."

Specifically, HRC notes, Barr has supported policy that discriminates against transgender people, and he has argued that prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation "seeks to ratify, or put on an equal plane, conduct that was previously considered immoral."

Barr has also spoken out against sex education and condom distribution because "by removing the costs of [sexual] misconduct, the government serves to perpetuate it."

For a related POZ article, see "George H.W. Bush Is Not Fondly Remembered By AIDS Activists." And "Trump Agency is Using Federal HIV Funds to Separate Immigrant Families."

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