You’re Fired!

What’s going on with the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS?

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Donald Trump used to end episodes of the TV contest The Apprentice with the words “You’re fired!” And the host turned president is still at it. President Trump ended 2017 by terminating the 16 remaining members of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA).

Founded in 1995 by President Clinton, PACHA helps guide the nation’s response to the epidemic. Members are not paid, and it’s not unusual for new presidents to clean house and appoint their own people. What’s odd this time around is that Trump did so after a full year in office—and after some PACHA members whose terms ended earlier in the year had been sworn back in. The firings also arrive after six other members had already resigned in protest against Trump’s lack of knowledge about the epidemic and his efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

AIDS advocates expressed concern over who will fill the PACHA vacancies—if they are even filled. (The Office of National AIDS Policy, also founded in the ’90s, hasn’t had a director since Trump took office.)

“There is a strong value in having an independent and evidence-based council that can provide the administration with the best advice on ending the HIV epidemic,” wrote advocacy group AIDS United on its POZ blog. “PACHA should have members who fully reflect the breadth of individuals living with and affected by HIV. As such, it should contain a diversity of opinions as well as racial, gender and LGBTQ representation.”

The issue becomes more worrisome in light of recent reports that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had banned words such as diversity, science-based and transgender from budget documents. As AIDS United put it: ”We don’t want the new PACHA to become a rubber stamp for policies and partisan strategies that harm efforts to end the epidemic.”

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