# 4 Issues in Congress That Need Your Action Today

Ignite your HIV activism in time for World AIDS Day. These six resources make it quick and easy.

November 27, 2017 By Matthew Rose

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Unleash your revolutionary spirit December 1 for World AIDS Day. It's a time that reminds people of what happens when you unleash radical compassion to move the hearts and minds of people, and of what happens when you share stories, take action and hold people accountable to the shared humanity of us all. We need this radical compassion right now so we can push the political will required to continue gaining ground.

We stand at a tipping point. Can we truly make meaningful change to bend the course of this epidemic? This December 1 will launch us into an unprecedented political climate, a time in which the narrative of HIV is included in the background of so many other big and meaningful issues debated in Washington, DC. As the government tries to ponder big decisions about priorities and budgets, we in the HIV field need to decide where we stand. We are a community that wasn't afraid to ACT UP to wake a generation and save our lives. We are a people with a revolutionary spirit that woke a world into decades of action. Let this December 1 be another cry in the night, one that calls for actions and for principles that will take our movement forward.

A massive political upheaval is taking place that has the ability to reshape—for better or much worse—the lives of people living with and vulnerable to HIV. Shortly after World AIDS Day, Congress members will take their final votes on a variety of important issues that affect the HIV population. I outline four of them below. Now is the time to be heard. A five-minute phone call to your legislators can have a profound influence on the state of affairs in this country. As we saw in this summer's health care debate, it was people power that ended efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA, or Obamacare). These days, when the personal becomes political, our movement can have a big impact on the federal level.

1. Appropriations Bills

The appropriations bills have not been completed—this legislation is the primary way your tax dollars get spent and where the funding originates for the bulk of HIV programs. The current deal or continuing resolution (CR) (Public Law 115-56) runs through December 8. Without a budget

deal, we will face a government shutdown. Having continued—or increased—funding is critical to our community. We have spent decades building government resources, such as Ryan White programs and Medicaid, so much so that we wouldn't be able to fill in the gap in services if we lost government funding. It is important that we fight back against cuts to our programs that are so important to our lives.

2. Health Care Reform

This next big item is the perennial topic of health care reform. There is a joint deal in the senate, put together by Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander and Democrat Sen. Patty Murray that would stabilize the health care markets over the next year or two. According to a new analysis by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), a non-partisan legislative scorekeeper, the proposed bipartisan bill to stabilize the ACA markets would cut the federal deficit by $3.8 billion but wouldn't do much to change health insurance premiums for 2018, mainly because they were baked into the process when rates were set back in June.

The federal government would also save money by funding the ACA's cost-sharing reduction payments (CSRs) for two years, preventing it from having to pay insurers more to cover separate subsidies tied to rising premiums. Alexander and Murray had originally hoped this would help keep rates steady in 2019. Crafted by Senate HELP Committee leaders, the bill has the backing of at least 12 Republicans and 12 Democrats in the Senate—but it is unlikely to pass a stand-alone bill and it would need to be attached to some other piece of legislation.

3. Tax Bill

From an economic side, it is extremely important that our community watch and respond to the tax debate. That's because taxes fund many of our programs, and without the revenue we will see extreme cutbacks. On Thursday, November 2, House Republican leadership unveiled their plan for "tax reform," the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. The plan, which would add an estimated $1.5 trillion to the deficit over the next decade, is focused predominantly on providing significant tax cuts for corporations and the wealthiest Americans while leaving low- and middle-income families stuck paying the bills. If that isn't bad enough, one of the ways proposed to pay for these tax cuts is a massive cut in the social safety net in our country. The bill is calls for $5.8 trillion in program cuts over the next 10 years to help make this tax cut permanent.

This cut, however, would include roughly $1.8 trillion for Medicaid, Medicare and other health care programs as well as a further $800 billion in cuts to non-defense discretionary spending, which is the pool our money is pulled from to pay for our programs. The funding pie would get smaller, meaning smaller pieces for everyone: HIV prevention, treatment and care programs, substance abuse services, housing, overall education, transportation, scientific and medical research and child care, just to name a few. When you couple this with the fact that more than 40 percent of people living with HIV use Medicaid as their health insurance, these cuts become quite dangerous for our community.

4. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

The fourth issue to keep your eyes is the DACA discussion (the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals immigration policy). While some people might not see the HIV link here as clearly as in other places, I ask you to consider the following story: Just the other week a friend of mine was trying to strategize about an HIV-positive veteran who was also a DACA recipient hiding from his lawyers; he didn't have his meds with him. In other words, this example shows that people who fear assault by the state might pull away from systems of care. And the DACA fight is just the beginning of how we as a country will decide how we treat those in need.

The HIV community is built on care and compassion. We have changed the world with our expressions of these values. We can do it again. Although we have members and allies in all levels of power, the fight will be hard. President Donald Trump made clear in a meeting with Republican senators that he opposes any effort to include in any year-end spending deal deportation protections for 800,000 young undocumented immigrants, the so-called dreamers who've benefited from the DACA program.

We know that when we rise, we rally the will of the people and shape history. Today's battle is a continuation of a struggle that we have consistently advocated for 30 years. We have stood up and defended what is rightfully ours in the journey toward an end of the epidemic. We rise for the people we know, for the people who have passed, for those living with HIV, and for those who need our hope. We rise to remind others that the call of the HIV community has moved mountains and has changed the course of history.

Take the time and use some of the resources below, then reach out and make yourself heard!

Resources

- AIDS Budget & Appropriations Coalition (ABAC): A list of work targeted at Capitol Hill around the federal budget
- Protect our care: An action kit to oppose the current tax bill
- Resist Bot: A tool to help you write to Congress members quicker and easier
- ResistanceNearMe.org**: A** roundup of **#Resist actions near you this week.**
- TrumpTaxToolkit.org: More ways you can fight against tax cuts for the 1%
- CallMyCongress.com: This app will help you locate your local lawmakers

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