40 Years Ago I Tested HIV Positive. We Must Take the Streets Again.

Only through direct action driven by righteous anger can we rouse the rest of us to the danger and insanity that is right before our eyes.

March 15, 2025 By Mark S. King

“If this article doesn’t scare the shit out of you, we’re in real trouble… Our continued existence depends on just how angry you can get.”

– Larry Kramer, “1,112 and Counting,” The New York Native, 1983

Forty years ago, on March 15th, 1985, I received my HIV positive test result. Reaching this milestone is beyond anything I could have imagined as a frightened 24-year-old, and I have written about the experience, and about the many eventful years since, many times.

That is not the story I want to tell you, not again. What I want you to know, what I must absolutely convince you of, is that the time has come to lay our bodies on the line again. Not since the 1980s has there been a more perilous time to be a person living with HIV, to mention nothing of being an American.

“Plague!” Larry Kramer once famously shouted, pounding the table as AIDS activists argued inane minutiae of how best to organize. “We are in the middle of a fucking PLAGUE!”

Larry is gone. But you are here, and I am here. And by God I have awakened from my self-imposed protective slumber and there is a plague on both our houses, Democratic and Republican alike. Only through direct action driven by righteous anger can we rouse the rest of us to the danger and insanity that is right before our eyes.

The daily assaults are nearly beyond comprehension, and that is by design. We have a Secretary of Health and Human Services who has questioned if HIV is the cause of AIDS and who is holding vaccine development meetings, another subject he openly questions, behind closed doors. The institutions meant to maintain our health and protect our democracy are being dismantled.

The cavalry ain’t coming. Our political leaders have not risen to the challenge. This is our battle, yours and mine. Do not look away. Do not be silent. Do not allow the shocking, daily outrages numb you to our collective national crisis. If we do, we can say goodbye to the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), and HIV clinics and all the rest we have worked for decades to build.

People are organizing. Are you with them? They have packed ACT UP meetings in New York, protested in small cities about ICE, DOGE, and the freezing of PEPFAR funding, and even took to the streets during the international CROI conference in San Francisco.

HIV Action Network at CROI Save Our Sciences rally, March 10, 2025 (Liz Highleyman)

I am reminded of the 1987 AIDS protest at the White House, which included the leaders of nearly every national religious, political, and HIV community-based organization. Many of them were arrested. And by that I mean every marquee name in our community. Would the current directors of our national organizations do the same today? I think they must. Without question. For that matter, the essay you are reading should have been written by HRC or AmFAR or GMHC, not simply by a guy with HIV and a keyboard.

The United States Conference on HIV/AIDS (USCHA) will be held this fall in Washington, DC, September 4-7th. I see no better time for us to gather at the White House and make our fury known. Yes, some of us will get arrested and some of us will get roughed up. It's a battle we must engage with everything we have in us. I have no idea what form civil disobedience during USCHA may take, but I will be there.

If you are not yet a member of coalitions of people living with HIV/AIDS and our allies, you're late. Go to their sites and join now. If you can't protest, give them money. They include the Positive Women's Network USA, Sero Project, Prep4All, Treatment Action Group, Health Gap, Rise and

Resist, and many others. Find one now and support it.

Meanwhile, mark your calendars for USCHA in September.

Will be wild.

Mark

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.