# America Wants Its Soul Back

October 7, 2011 By Regan Hofmann

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They're listed as "unalienable rights" in the United States Declaration of Independence and if I hadn't been born here, they'd be three compelling reasons to pursue the American Dream.

But lately, the American Dream has become a bit of a nightmare.

I won't review the obvious. But what's happening in Washington around the negotiations to reduce the federal deficit, the political gridlock and our economy has a trickle down effect on the work we're doing to protect people with HIV/AIDS. I am deeply concerned that any agreement reached on Capitol Hill about how this country pays its bills (an agreement that needs to have painful reality checks in it to secure the financial future of the United States and have a positive effect on the world's economy) could potentially deal terrible blows to domestic and global AIDS budgets. That is, unless we all do something about it right now. We have a couple of weeks. The Super Committee will (hopefully) put forth a proposal on November 23. That's 40 days. Forty days for us to make sure that AIDS funding is defended.

That's the bad news. We may soon be a world of a lot less money for domestic and global health.

The good news is that after 30 years of waging social and scientific war against HIV, recent breakthroughs show it is possible to start ending AIDS.

New data from U.S.-funded research proves that HIV treatment works as prevention and that if we reallocate the resources we already have to get more people living with HIV into care while strategically applying other tools and fresh, targeted efforts to improve prevention efforts, we can stop HIV from spreading for good. Maybe even in our lifetime. We can't do it alone. The rest of the world has to help. But America has always led a bipartisan charge for fighting AIDS and if we up our ante, others may be more likely to follow. China. India. South Africa. Germany. Russia.

The question is no longer, "Can we end AIDS?" but "Will we end AIDS?" The current POZ cover story--"R.I.P. HIV"--lays out what we need to do it.

So, the bad news is that we may soon have less money. But the good news is we have a really great case to make about why our special interest deserved to be funded. Defending the perimeter of AIDS funding saves lives, saves future health care dollars but most importantly, it can get rid of one of the most horrific scourges on the planet. And secure for everyone who makes it

possible a place in the humanitarian history books. Ending AIDS. It is a nice legacy.

If we could end poverty, wouldn't we? If we could stop all future war, wouldn't we? If we could end world hunger, wouldn't we? If we could stop global warming, wouldn't we?

Since we can end AIDS, shouldn't we?

So I ask you: Are you ready to end AIDS?

Did I hear a hell yeah?

Okay, then I need you (and this goes for all my HIV-negative friends too!) to add your signature to this petition to request that President Barack Obama make a public statement on December 1--World AIDS Day--indicating he will lead the global charge to start ending AIDS now.

The petition is part of the "96% Campaign"--so called in light of data from a study known as "HPTN 052" that shows when you give treatment to people with HIV you not only save their lives, you also can reduce the risk of HIV transmission by a whopping 96%. The campaign was launched Wednesday by Health GAP, Sisterlove and the HIV Prevention Justice Alliance.

This is the campaign video. (Note: you can share it! And like it!)

Sign the petition here: http://www.treataidsendaids.org/.

You can sign anonymously...and you don't have to disclose your HIV status.

Why is it important to sign this? Because when we ask the President and/or administration and/or Congress to get behind an issue, they need to know we are behind them. So let's show them that tens of thousands of people living with HIV and our friends and families care about Presidential and U.S. governmental leadership on AIDS.

As you know, our nation is starting to wake up--and revolt. "Occupy Wall Street" has gotten traction and the attention of the national press. The movement is spreading across the country. Many Americans are so scared and furious about the impasses on Capitol Hill, joblessness, the federal deficit debate and the state of the economy that they are occupying Wall Street and other places in protest. The HIV community should join their ranks and fight for campaign finance reform, changes in the tax code, increases in living-wage jobs while fighting against other aspects of our nation's economy that perpetuate inequality. Especially relevant to people with HIV is fighting for health care for all (and by this we mean truly universal care, not mandated, get-your-own care).

This has already started to happen. ACT UP was on the scene two days ago in Manhattan, highlighting how the financial crisis is sapping funds from AIDS care and health care in general.

(In case you're not scared, or mad enough, yet, review these shocking statistics on American economic inequality from Mother Jones' analysis.)

For a glimpse into the many issues people are raising throughout the "Occupy" protests, check out wearethe99percent.tumblr.com.

According to Gay City News, Kathleen Chalfant (who acted in Tony Kushner's "Angels in America" and "The Laramie Project", Moises Kaufman's documentary play about the Matthew Shepard murder) said of her presence at the Wall Street protest, "I'm here because I'm an American and I want our country back. I don't recognize it anymore. It's in danger of losing not only its economy but also its soul."

Indeed. One of the great defining characteristics of America has always been its willingness to fiercely protect its own citizens and others around the world who are unable to fend for themselves. It feels very strange to think that our great nation is now stuck in a choke-hold by a tiny majority of its wealthiest citizens who seem hell-bent on ousting our President--even if the baby that gets thrown out with that bath water is America itself.

The AIDS movement wrote the text book for how a small group of scared and angry people can change the world for the better.

The time has come to do it again. And those who fought for AIDS can teach those who are fighting now. What's different this time is that AIDS is now but one of the many reasons Americans will die unless we convince our government that adequate income and access to health care should be basic human rights.

Chalfant is right. It is time this country return to its roots--and find its soul.

And the best way for each of us to ensure that happens is to speak up together.

No group of people knows better the maxim "Silence = Death" than those of us living with HIV whose lives were spared by those who dared speak truth to power. Now, it's our turn.

Sign this petition now: http://www.treataidsendaids.org.

---

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.