A Change Is Gonna Come

President Biden says racial justice will be a priority for his administration and NMAC says prove it by ending the HIV epidemic.

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A President's Inauguration is usually a joyous moment of celebration, at least for the winning party. Because of COVID, unemployment, and the raid on Congress, there is little happiness or the mood to celebrate. I just want this inauguration to be over as quickly and safely as possible. There is lots of work to be accomplished.

The Biden's administration number one priority has to be COVID and getting control of the pandemic while rapidly getting out the vaccine. If we've learned anything from this experience, we learned that we weren't ready and too many people died because of it. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a long way to go to repair its relationships, both internally and externally. I asked the Biden transition team focused on the CDC to make sure the new director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, addresses the toxic culture of racist aggressions outlined in a July 2020 New York Times article. NMAC supports their request that the director declare "racism a public health challenge." Not only will that go a long way to heal internal issues, but it will also put the CDC in alignment with the Biden administration.

President Biden says racial justice will be a priority for his administration and NMAC says prove it by ending the HIV epidemic. How will this White House priority transform HIV services to align with this presidential priority? What is HHS, CDC, HRSA, HUD, SAMHSA, NIH, et al., doing to meet these new administration's values? NMAC challenges all federal agencies to show how their HIV funding is addressing the President's call for racial justice.

NMAC applauds President Biden's nomination of Dr. Rachel Levine to his Assistant Secretary of Health. She will be the first out transgender federal official to be confirmed by the Senate. Federal offices with significant HIV funding should follow his lead by hiring people living with HIV, people of color, LGBTQ, and especially people of trans experience as federal employees. If Black Trans Lives Matter, then there should be Black Trans people in leadership positions at HHS, CDC, HRSA, HUD, SAMHSA, NIH et al. NMAC is concerned that too many federal offices with significant HIV funding have too few staff from the communities hardest hit by HIV. How can you build programs that reach community when community isn't on your team? One of the unfortunate lessons from COVID, like HIV, is that, while the viruses don't discriminate, the lack of healthcare and prevention infrastructure can kill you.

COVID has shown us that we must call out these inequities. We cannot stay silent and expect things to change. Because the Democrats control the White House and Congress, we have an opportunity to make real change. However, it’s only a two-year window. With Speaker Pelosi’s 2022 retirement, I worry for our future. We will never have another Speaker who will be as friendly to the HIV community as she was. Our community owes her a great debt of gratitude.

Yours in the struggle,

Paul Kawata

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/change-gonna-come-racial-justice