Democratic National Convention: “Don’t Boo. Vote!”

DNC speeches and the party platform highlight these HIV/AIDS issues.

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On July 26th, the 2016 Democratic National Convention (DNC) began in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. During the convention, Secretary Hillary Clinton officially became the Democratic presidential nominee, making her the first woman to ever be nominated by a major political party in the United States. The convention brought together politicians, celebrities, and Americans to unify the Democratic Party behind the presumptive candidate, despite heavy protests from the “Bernie or Bust” movement and the resignation of the DNC Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz following the WikiLeaks of top DNC officials’ emails. The leaked emails suggested that committee staff complained about and brainstormed ways to spin the media against Senator Bernie Sanders’ (I-VT) campaign, despite the expectation that the DNC should remain neutral during the primary. The content of these emails further infuriated some Sanders supporters and delegates—leading to protests that flared up at times throughout the convention.

The DNC speakers embodied the diversity within the party and included recognition of HIV/AIDS issues. Daniel Driffin, from Atlanta, Georgia, was the first openly HIV-positive speaker to speak at the convention for twelve years. (You can watch and/or read his speech on POZ.com here.) Driffin co-founded THRIVE S.S. Inc. a non-profit organization that addresses HIV issues faced by men who have sex with men (MSM) of color. He also served as a Georgia Equality Youth HIV Policy Advisor funded proudly by an AIDS United Positive Organizing Project Grant. In his speech, he highlighted Clinton’s record of HIV advocacy as First Lady, Senator, and Secretary of State, saying that Clinton assured that 6.7 million people around the world had access to antiretroviral therapy while serving as Secretary of State. She also worked in partnership with the Congressional Black Caucus to lift a travel ban in the United States, which had previously barred people living with HIV from entering the country. Driffin ended his speech by confidently concluding, “With Hillary Clinton as our president, I believe that we can meet our goals of an AIDS-free generation.”

Sarah McBride also became the first transgender person to ever speak at a convention when she spoke on Thursday. Cecile Richards, President of the Planned Parenthood Action Fund, also spoke during the convention about the important role played by Planned Parenthood in our health care system and she highlighted that Clinton would support Planned Parenthood as president. Planned Parenthood provides access to HIV screening and testing along with other forms of vital health

care. Chad Griffin, President of the Human Rights Campaign, also spoke at the convention noting that Donald Trump's choice as running mate Mike Pence (R-IN) sought to divert HIV funding in support of the practice of conversion therapy while stating that Hilary Clinton was committed to stopping HIV and banning conversion therapy. Many other speakers attested to Clinton's work on health care reform throughout her law and political career.

The 2016 Democratic Party Platform also discusses HIV/AIDS issues in depth. The platform affirms that an AIDS-free generation is within our reach and pledges to implement the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, increase funding for the National Institutes of Health, cap pharmaceutical expenses faced by those living with HIV and AIDS, reform harmful HIV criminalization laws, expand access to harm reduction programs and preventive medications, and continue our commitment to PEPFAR.

The platform also pledges to advocate for the expansion of health care coverage through the implementation of the Affordable Care Act and to stand up for Planned Parenthood. The platform acknowledges the opioid epidemic and calls for expanded access to prevention and treatment while also advocating for policy change such as the full implementation of the Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act of 2008.

Remarks from President Obama, who headlined the third day of the convention, highlighted health care reform as a particular area of success for Democrats, saying "After a century of trying, we declared that health care in America is not a privilege for a few, it is a right for everybody." Obama specifically hailed Clinton as his successor and someone who would continue to fight for health care reform. Facing shouting from the floor after mentioning Trump, he told the convention, "Don't boo. Vote."

On the final day, Hillary Clinton accepted the nomination for President, a first for the U.S. Although she did not specifically mention HIV, she spoke about health care, supported the Affordable Care Act saying that 20 million more people had health insurance from the time that the Obama administration came into office, and called attention to her bipartisan work on the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

AIDS United will continue to monitor the election and is working to ensure all candidates focus on the important task of ending HIV in the U.S. and the world.

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