



Happy Pride 2024

While things might look bleak, we are on the right side of history.

June 18, 2024 By [Paul Kawata](#)

This “iconic” photo is from the 1979 San Francisco Pride Parade. It was my first march and we were going to change the world. But life had other plans. The next day, this picture was on the cover of the San Francisco Chronicle and it pushed me out of the closet to my family. At the time, I was a sophomore in college to become a dentist. Little did we know that a virus would soon turn our lives upside down.

What started as a fight for equality turned into a fight for our lives. Like so many of us, I altered the course of my life to end an epidemic that was killing people I loved. From those deep losses and hard life lessons, I learned to be stronger than I ever imagined I could be. It was the only way to be a part of a community that really was going to change the world, in an interconnected yet different way than I had imagined on the day of that 1979 Pride Parade.

One of the things we have all realized in building the HIV movement, especially as people of color, is that we couldn’t wait for the system to help us. If we wanted to survive and perhaps even thrive, we had to create our own systems of HIV prevention and care. We had to advocate for and create life-affirming systems that changed the way healthcare was and still is provided, especially to people of color. We had to demand that the healthcare system and the political system switch from being doctor-focused to patient-centered. HIV was on the vanguard of fighting an unknown virus.

As I get older, I’m reminded of the friends who are not here. Their voices and stories get more pronounced as I age. Yet, in this current climate, 45 years since that Pride Parade in San Francisco there is little time for memories. While I’m trying not to sound panicked, I want to ring the alarm that, once again, there are multiple anti-LGBTQ riders looking to be attached to the 2025 federal budget. The radical right continues their attacks on the communities hardest hit by HIV, especially the transgender community.

This should worry everyone committed to ending the HIV epidemic in America. As we saw last year, the House tried to drastically cut support for the Ending the HIV Epidemic (EHE) initiative, which is till date, the federal government’s largest domestic HIV/AIDS program. We should expect similar recommendations in the House’s FY 25 budget. Since this budget will be delayed until after the November elections, so much hangs in the balance.

After four decades of fighting for our lives, we as a community get numb to the relentless attacks

on our dignity and basic rights. These lies traumatize and send underground the people we need to reach. This weaponization affects our ability to scale up efforts to end the epidemic, to reach the 500,000 Americans living with HIV who are either unaware of their HIV status or out of HIV care, and sexually active adults who could prevent HIV by taking PrEP and also now prevent an STI by taking doxyPEP.

We stand on the shoulders of heroes. This Pride, I remember and celebrate their lives. The struggle is real, and it continues. While things might look bleak, we are on the right side of history. So let's enjoy the summer and then, let's [Get Out The Vote](#) like our lives depend on it (because they do!).

Yours in the struggle and Happy PRIDE,

Paul Kawata

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