Health & Human Services Backs Blood Ban

June 14, 2010 By Shawn Decker

Late on Friday, a Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee voted 9-6 in favor of keeping the ban on gay and bisexual men from being allowed to donate blood. Senator John Kerry had led the surge to have the ban lifted, and said that the ban prevents access to "blood that could save lives" and discriminates "not because they have engaged in highly risky behavior, but because they are gay."

Proving myself to be a red sheep, my attitude differs from many of my thinblooded brothers and sisters. Turns out that hemophilia patient groups have come out in support of keeping the ban, which was set in place in the mid-80's, when there was an absolute need for the ban and an assessment of blood safety concerns, a process which moved along very slowly at the cost of thousands of lives.

At the time, the blood ban wasn't discriminatory, it was a necessary. A safeguard based on what was known at the time: that gay men were being disproportionately affected by a virus, which gave them something in common with the hemophilia community who were also being infected through tainted blood products. Around the same time that the ban was put in place, the first antibody test for HIV was approved.

Science has come a long way since those frightening times and, these days, the blood ban is as out-of-date as the hairstyles of the mid-80's... Williamsburg/Brooklyn hipsters notwithstanding.

I understand the scars the thinblood community has collected; the 1970's were bell-bottoms and hepatitis B. The 1980's brought HIV and the 1990's were the decade of C+C Music Factory and hepatitis C. And I've gotten every souvenir offered by my reliance on blood products. So I understand the deep mistrust of the blood industry. But I am also a believer in science and moving forward. I'm with the Red Cross and their opinion that that blood ban needs to be repealed.

It seems like the ball may not bounce that way, as it's assumed that the FDA will follow the HHS's vote when it comes time to make a decision on whether or not to lift the ban, which deeply upsets me. I think screening should be based on sexual practices, not sexual orientations. It just seems so backwards and wrong at this point.

Hate to start the week with a bummer of a post. I'll try to dig up something fun for the next entry, all the while hoping that the voices of reason prevail now... just as they did twenty-five years ago when the tough decision to put the blood ban in place was made.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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