Why the Midterm Elections Matter to People Living With HIV

470 seats are up for grabs in Congress. Here's how you can be an informed and active voter.

August 3, 2018 By AIDS United

Elections have consequences. We heard those words often two years ago before the 2016 Presidential election. At AIDS United, we said them ourselves many times in the months before the election. Back then, the phrase was motivational, but it was also aspirational. It was uttered at a time when we thought we had the luxury of focusing on the gains we had yet to make in ending the HIV epidemic and ensuring everyone living in the United States had access to affordable, quality medical care. When we spoke those words again after November 9th, 2016, their intonation and implications had changed. Then, we were no longer imagining the progress that might come as a result of our advocacy—because, as we will not tire of reminding you, voting is HIV advocacy—but instead we were girding ourselves to defend at all costs the progress we had already made.

Today, when we say that elections have consequences, it is done with a newfound sense of urgency born of the consequences that we have already had to live with and fight back against for so many seemingly interminable months. Thanks to your tireless advocacy, we have managed to protect the gains made by the Affordable Care Act to the best of our ability, but the glow from the remarkable victory we cemented with Senator McCain's dramatic downward thrust of his thumb last summer has been dimmed by the subsequent repeal of the ACA's individual mandate and the Trump administration's repeated attempts to sabotage our country's health care law.

For immigrants in this country who are living with or impacted by HIV, the consequences of this last election have been a matter of life or death. Under this administration's draconian immigration policies, far too many documented and undocumented immigrants have been intimidated and terrified out of HIV care, forced to choose between deportation and viral suppression. For women and the LGBTQ community in the United States, the consequences of 2016 could be felt for generations, as Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court on the heels of Neil Gorsuch's confirmation could result in the overturning of Roe vs. Wade and the erosion of hard-won protections for LGBTQ rights.

These consequences are horrific, but they are not permanent or irreversible. In three months, we have a chance to take the first truly significant step in undoing them at the federal level by making our voices heard at the ballot box in the midterm elections. There are 470 seats in Congress up for

grabs on November 6th, and the future of everything it is that we hold dear to us is at stake. Surely, after what has happened since election night in 2016, we now know that such statements are not hyperbole. Every battle we have waged over the past 18 months for HIV funding or health care access or immigration rights or anything else you can think of has its origins in that 2016 election. The 2018 midterm elections represent the HIV community's first opportunity to collectively express our concerns and our hopes with our votes since that night, and we cannot waste the opportunity.

There is plenty that you can do between now and the 2018 midterm elections to ensure that the voices of people living with and affected by HIV are heard. AIDS United has set up an Elections Resource Center designed to help you become an informed and active voter in 2018. Wondering what you need to do personally to register to vote, find your polling place, determine your state's voter ID laws, or learn more about HIV-related policies? Check out our Voter Center page. Do you run or work at a HIV non-profit and are worried about what you can and can't do around electoral advocacy and outreach? Use our page on Election Resources for Community Based Organization. Want to organize a voter registration drive or motivate others to get involved in the midterms? Try our page on Getting Engaged in Your Community.

AIDS United is dedicated to seeing that the HIV community is engaged with, informed on, and registered for the 2018 midterm elections. We encourage you to utilize our Elections Resource Center and continue checking in with our blog for the latest HIV-related election news. Elections do have consequences, and we need to make sure that people living with HIV play a major role in determining what those consequences are.

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