Spotlighting Eight Potential HIV Champions in the 117th Congress

Ending HIV requires lawmakers in Congress dedicated to health equity, racial justice, sex education, housing and more.

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Over the coming weeks, Congress will be reshaped by a historic group of first-term legislators. This year's incoming class is made up of people who have worked as educators, activists, health care providers, pastors, small business owners and even as nonprofit leaders. This class is historic in many ways but most notably for having the first two Black openly gay members of Congress.

We know that ending HIV will take a comprehensive effort from those dedicated to working on health care reform and access to racial justice and housing. For these reasons, we are hoping to see several members of Congress join Reps. Barbara Lee and Jenniffer González-Colón in the Congressional HIV/AIDS Caucus.

One of the members that we will be watching is Rep. Cori Bush, who represents the people of St. Louis and Ferguson, Missouri, whose campaign was centered on racial justice. Those of us working in the HIV field know that without racial justice and racial equity, there will be no end to HIV. As someone who worked as a nurse, she understands these issues not only from a social lens but also from a medical lens, and we are looking forward to working with Bush because

We are also looking forward to working with the many first-term representatives from New York such as Rep. Jamaal Bowman, who represents the people of the northern Bronx, Yonkers and the southern half of Westchester county; Rep. Mondaire Jones, who represents Rockland County and part of Westchester county; and Rep. Ritchie Torres, who represents the Bronx. This is especially a historic win for Bowman and Jones, who represent parts of New York that, over the last decade, have seen an increase in people of color and especially an increase of immigrants among constituents. It is critically important that our leaders reflect their constituents and understand the challenges they face.

We also hope to work alongside Rep. Peter Meijer, who represents the people who live between Grand Rapids and Lansing, Michigan. We expect to work with Meijer to help bring prescription drug costs down and ensure that all of those living with HIV are able to afford their medications. This will allow those living with HIV to remain on PrEP and those vulnerable to HIV to have access to PEP.

Rep. Teresa Fernandez, who represents those living in the northern half of New Mexico including Santa Fe, is someone else we are watching. As a breast-cancer survivor, Fernandez knows well the concerns that we share over health care coverage being denied over preexisting conditions. We hope to work with her to ensure equitable health care access for all, including those living with HIV.

Representing those from San Diego, Rep. Sara Jacobs is another first term legislator who stands to make an impact in this legislative term. Jacob has an extensive background centered on the needs of children, specifically around child poverty and education. We know that this experience is well-suited to ensure the needs of those of us most vulnerable to HIV are met. Additionally, we are hopeful that Jacobs can assist in ensuring that all are able to have access to a comprehensive, inclusive sexual health education. From her commitment to racial justice to her goal to secure access to health care, including reproductive health care, we are looking forward to what she will bring to the table in the 117th Congress.

The election of Rep. Nikema Williams, representing those in Atlanta, Georgia, is especially impressive. Williams is taking over Rep. John Lewis' former seat. Her advocacy for voting rights, women's rights, racial equity and health care are all policy areas we are also passionate about, especially when the impacts of successful, community-led policy can address the disproportionate impact of HIV on communities in the South.

The work to end the HIV epidemic in the United States reaches across party lines, identities and issue areas, and the incoming first term legislators are well-poised to rise to the challenge. We hope that all members join our efforts to support individuals living with and vulnerable to HIV as we work to end the HIV epidemic.

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