Vote Tuesday! Make Sure the HIV/AIDS Community Is Heard!

November 1, 2012 By Paul Kawata

First, let me say that the thoughts and prayers of everyone here at NMAC are with those affected by Hurricane Sandy. Our own offices suffered some fairly significant water damage from the storm, but we were extremely lucky that our area was not more heavily impacted. We wish everyone a safe and speedy recovery. While the Northeast works to repair the damage caused by Sandy, however, the rest of the nation continues to prepare for next week's election, where, Americans will once again cast their ballots for president of the United States. They will also decide the make up of the House and Senate. The stakes of this election cannot be overstated. The outcome will determine the future of health care reform, as well as programs like Medicare and Medicaid. With four sitting Supreme Court justices over the age of 70, the next president could decide the make up of our nation's highest court for decades to come. And as sequestration threatens more than $650 million in funding for HIV/AIDS programs, the outcome of this election could influence any deal Congress works out to avoid these disastrous cuts. Tuesday's vote will also decide the future of critical social policies like LGBT equality, funding for women's health programs, including Planned Parenthood, and hot button issues like federal funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage education and syringe services programs.

The National Minority AIDS Council cannot and does not support any candidate for public office. But we do think that it is critically important that the voices of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS are heard. The most fundamental way that we do this is by VOTING! As the grandson of immigrants, voting has always meant a great deal to me. As a gay man, that right became even more critical. As an HIV/AIDS advocate, it is indispensable!

I know that I am preaching to the choir, you're going to vote. But are you going to get out the vote? Please consider sending an email to your agency's clients, donors and friends asking them to vote. As a 501(c)3 organization, its illegal to ask people to vote for a specific candidate, but that does not mean you can't ask people to vote generally. If you really want to make a difference, consider arranging transportation to get your clients to polling locations. They may want to vote, but may not have the resources to get to the polls.

Unfortunately, many states have made it increasingly difficult to cast your vote. Courts across the country are considering a number of controversial voter ID laws, as well as early voting rules, that effectively suppress minority and disabled voting. Given our constituency, I'm extremely troubled by these trends. To help ensure that all our constituents have the information they need to exercise their constitutional right to vote, I wanted to share some great resources with you.

? Rock the Vote has fantastic information about each state's voting deadlines and polling place hours. You can find this information online here: http://www.rockthevote.com/election-center/

? The National Conference of State Legislatures also has a break down of the various voter ID laws/requirements by state. You can access that information on their website here: http://www.ncsl.org/-legislatures-elections/elections/voter-id.aspx

It’s hard to believe that after more than a year of non-stop campaigning, the election is finally here. Now it’s our time to be heard. I am casting my ballot early so I don’t miss this important opportunity. I hope you will join me. Please vote.

Yours in the struggle,

Paul Kawata
Executive Director
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