Voting for President Will Impact National HIV/AIDS Response

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With the results nearly complete from last week's "mini-Super Tuesday" primaries, the likely contours of the general election for president are emerging. Several important primaries remain, including those in New York (April 19), Connecticut, Pennsylvania (April 26), and California (June 7), so there will be continued attention to the contests between the Democratic candidates and among the remaining Republican candidates, but Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump lead their respective races. The battle for the presidential nominations of the two parties is riveting, but beyond the personalities of the candidates, we as HIV advocates need to focus on the implications the 2016 elections have on the domestic and global response to HIV/AIDS.

Last week, the results of a survey of presidential candidates' positions, statements, and views on HIV/AIDS was released. The questionnaire, supported by AIDS United and over 50 other organizations, was sent to all of the Democratic and Republican candidates with a deadline for their responses. At the time of the release of the survey results, only Hilary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders responded. The complete responses of Mrs. Clinton and Senator Sanders can be read in this week's Policy Update.

It is hoped that we will hear from the Republican candidates about their views and policy positions on HIV/AIDS. As voters, the HIV community needs to know their views in order to make informed decisions about the candidates. The updated National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) targets the year 2020 for reducing new HIV infections, increasing access to care and improving health outcomes for people living with HIV, and reducing stigma and discrimination. The presidential candidate elected this coming November will form the administration that will be responsible for ensuring that the 2020 targets are met and will be responsible if the targets are neglected. There is already sufficient scientific knowledge and an array of evidence-based programs that are needed to end the HIV epidemic and to ensure that all people living with HIV have access to the care, treatment, and supportive services they need. There is still much work to be done to end the HIV epidemic and provide universal care and treatment an across-the-board reality.

Elections have consequences. A consequence of this year’s presidential election must be a president and an administration that moves us towards achieving HIV/AIDS goals. Earlier this week, we were sadly and painfully reminded of the years in which a president was deathly silent on the emerging crisis of AIDS. We need a president who will pay attention to HIV/AIDS and who is committed to the vision of the NHAS. Let’s keep ourselves educated on the candidates and their positions. And remember that voting is HIV advocacy.

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