Working Together for an AIDS-Free Generation

November 30, 2012 By Paul Kawata

Tomorrow, December 1, is the 25th annual World AIDS Day, a day for remembrance, reflection and action. The theme this year, "Working Together for an AIDS-Free Generation," perfectly reflects the moment in which our movement finds itself.

For me, it feels especially fitting that World AIDS Day falls so close to Thanksgiving this year. We certainly have a lot to be thankful for. On November 6, voters in four states handed an historic victory to the movement for LGBT equality by endorsing marriage equality. Across the country, candidates that attacked women's reproductive rights were forcefully defeated. And while voters were offered the choice to dismantle health care reform, as well as Medicare and Medicaid, the largest providers of care for people living with HIV or AIDS in America, they voted for progress. Overall, this year's election advanced the principles of the Declaration to End HIV/AIDS in America, especially that unfettered access to quality, affordable health care, including HIV treatment is a fundamental human right.

Looking back on the previous year, I'm also incredibly proud of the work that NMAC has done to advance our collective goal of ending this epidemic. Not only did we mark our 25th anniversary, but we embarked on a number of historic undertakings. We submitted our first ever amicus brief in the Supreme Court challenge to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), ensuring that the voices of minorities living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS were represented. At this year's United States Conference on AIDS, we held the inaugural Summit to End HIV/AIDS in America, where we unveiled the Declaration to End HIV/AIDS in America. But most importantly, we continued our critical work building the capacity of minority-based and minority-serving organizations across the country, while helping them prepare for the transformations that will accompany implementation of health care reform and high impact prevention.

After more than a quarter of a century in the fight against this disease, I'm more hopeful than ever that an end is in sight. But World AIDS Day is more than just a time to reflect or give thanks for how far we've come -- it's a day for action. And we have much more to do.

Our country's finances remain dismal and the ideological divide between the parties is still massive. Considerable work remains in ensuring that the ACA is be fully implemented in a way that meets the needs of people living with HIV. Congress continues to ban the use of federal funds for evidence-based syringe services programs. Thirty-two states have HIV-specific criminal

statutes, which discourage testing and disclosure, while further stigmatizing people living with HIV or AIDS. Too many of our friends continue to struggle to access safe and affordable housing. And next year, the two largest federal programs aimed at addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the Ryan White CARE Act and PEPFAR, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, are up for reauthorization. But NMAC will continue represent the voice of communities of color here in Washington and across the country to ensure that these challenges are met head on.

The road ahead will not be easy. It never has been for our movement. But together, we always have and always will overcome the obstacles in our way. On this World AIDS Day, I hope you'll join us. Together, I know we will succeed in creating an AIDS-free generation.

Yours in the struggle,

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