

In love and in law

Baltimore City Councilmember proposes domestic partner registry legislation.

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Gender turbulence

GenderPAC, trans activists debate about mission of national group.

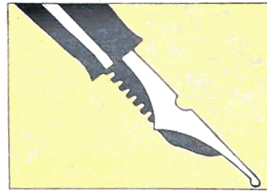
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Lesson to learn

Author bell hooks says black Gays have something to teach about love.

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The Washington Blade

SERVING THE NATION'S CAPITAL SINCE 1969

Valerie Papaya Mann, the openly Gay executive director of the District of Columbia Comprehensive AIDS Resources and Education Consortium: "Washington, D.C., has the highest AIDS prevalence rate in the entire country — a lot like Johannesburg."



by Clint Steib

'Until this war is won'

D.C. observes Black AIDS Awareness Day

by Rhonda Smith

African American AIDS activists observed National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness and Information Day in Washington, D.C., last Friday with a two-hour news conference and candlelight vigil at Howard University. Organizers designed the events to draw more attention to a story that began unfolding about 20 years ago.

"Washington, D.C., has the highest AIDS prevalence rate in the entire country — a lot like Johannesburg," said Valerie Papaya Mann, the openly Gay executive director of the District of Columbia Comprehensive AIDS Resources and Education Consortium. The D.C. CARE Consortium provides case management, housing, transportation, and emergency financial assistance services for 60 local HIV/AIDS member agencies.

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Syphilis outbreak hits L.A.

Most cases found in men who have sex with men

by Bill Roundy

Another study has turned up a concentration of syphilis among populations of men who have sex with men, this time in Southern California. While national rates of syphilis transmission are at their lowest levels since 1941, when reporting began, recent outbreaks in Seattle and New York City have led scientists to conclude that increasing numbers of Gay and bisexual men are abandoning safer sex practices.

According to a Feb. 22 report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), during the first six months of 2000, 130 cases of syphilis were reported in Southern California, including Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange County, Long Beach, and Riverside County.

Fifty-one percent of those patients (or 66 cases) were men who reported having at least one instance of sex with another man.

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Bush vows to boost AIDS research funds

Cuts in other federal HIV programs feared

by Lou Chibbaro Jr.

President George W. Bush this week proposed a budget for next year that calls for a \$2.8 billion increase in funding for the National Institutes of Health, the agency that oversees the federal government's AIDS research programs — thus retaining a bipartisan plan adopted by Congress and the Clinton administration in 1998 to double the NIH budget over a five-year period.

But AIDS activists and lobbyists say the increase actually leaves a gap of more than \$900 million in the HHS budget that will likely lead to cuts in other HHS programs, including, possibly, important AIDS programs.

In a 207-page budget "blueprint" released by the White House on Wednesday, Feb. 28, following the president's budget speech to Congress Tuesday night, Bush also proposed unspecified increases in funding for the

Housing Opportunities for People With AIDS program and for the U.S. Agency for International Development's effort to combat AIDS in developing nations, including those in Africa.

In addition, the Bush budget document proposes a \$124 million increase in the federal Community Health Care Centers program, which, among other things, provides assistance to people with AIDS who have low incomes. Another health-related section in the budget document that AIDS activists say can help people with AIDS is a call for an increase of \$111 million to expand substance abuse treatment services to people with low incomes.

The budget document makes no mention of proposed funding levels for breast cancer research programs.

White House officials said more details, including the specific "line-item" funding levels for HOPWA and overseas

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by Denise Watkins

All in the family

The Lesbian & Gay Chorus of Washington, directed by Ray Killian, perform at Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Fourth Annual Honors Gala, Saturday, Feb. 24. Honorees included Maryland Gov. Parris Glendening (D), Bet Mishpachah Rabbi Robert Saks, and Virginia residents Gena Richard and Eric Cox.

Blade's longtime advertising manager dies

Funeral services for Jim Deely, the Washington Blade's display advertising manager since 1984, are scheduled for Friday morning, March 2. Deely died on Feb. 25. See page 25 for his obituary.

'We can't continue to ignore things'

D.C. observes National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

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"We need to create more awareness about HIV and AIDS," Mann said. "Community-based organizations and activists are involved. All of us are doing the best we know how. And that's still not enough."

D.C. CARE was one of seven organizations nationwide that observed National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness and Information Day Feb. 23 to focus attention on the epidemic's impact on black people, and to encourage them to get tested for HIV. Agencies in Atlanta, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and Philadelphia also participated.

In D.C., there were 160 reported AIDS cases here for every 100,000 residents in 1999, the most recent year for which statistics are available, officials at the D.C. Health Department's Administration for HIV/AIDS said. The primary modes of exposure resulted from unprotected sexual contact between men, injection drug use, and heterosexual sexual contact.

"We are going to do this on this date every year until this war is won," said Nycal Anthony of the Philadelphia-based Concerned Black Men, one of five organizations in the Community Capacity Building Coalition, which sponsored the HIV/AIDS events nationwide. The CCBC involves a partnership between the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, Concerned Black Men, the National Black Alcoholism and Addictions Council, the Health Watch Information and Promotion Service, and Jackson State University.

In Washington, the D.C. Health Department and several local community-based AIDS service organizations offered free HIV testing and counseling on Feb. 23.

"We don't want this to be another situation where we declare war on another thing in the black community, and we lose," said Phil Pannell, D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams's liaison to the Gay community. "We have to be very vigilant and keep governmental and political people's feet to the fire."

Mann said the majority of people living with HIV are men who have sex with men. She also said some authorities on HIV/AIDS estimate that one out of every 30 D.C. residents is living with HIV. (D.C. is scheduled to begin tracking HIV infection rates later this year.)

HIV/AIDS was the leading cause of death in 1998 for black people in the United States between the ages of 25 and 44, figures from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show. Of the 753,907 total AIDS cases that have been reported to the CDC up to June 2000, 38 percent have been among African Americans, who make up 12 percent of the U.S. population.

Black populations facing the greatest risk for contracting HIV are youths, Gay and bisexual men, and heterosexual women and their partners, health officials said.

Pannell said more attention must be focused on helping young Gay black men, in particular, remain healthy. This is a challenge, he said, because young people tend to underestimate the likelihood that they will contract HIV.

"They haven't seen the carnage," he said. "They haven't had to cross out names in their telephone books."

Pannell also highlighted another problem he believes the Gay community must address.

"We are seeing white Gays lose interest around AIDS issues because many have access to drug cocktails," he said. "I have heard people say that Whitman-Walker Clinic is 'losing its focus,'" because more of its HIV/AIDS clients are seeking services there as a result



by Clint Steib

Mayoral liaison Phil Pannell (left), Valerie Papaya Mann, Don Jones, and Ron Simmons spoke at a D.C. CARE Consortium panel on Friday, Feb. 23.

of injection drug use — not because they are Gay."

Ron Simmons, executive director of Us Helping Us, People Into Living Inc., an AIDS service organization founded in 1985 to address the needs of black Gay and bisexual men, said that in addition to focusing on AIDS prevention, the black community must make sure people with HIV/AIDS receive adequate health care and have access to housing, among other services.

"There are many ideas about how to deal with the challenge facing us," said Simmons, who was diagnosed with HIV in 1989. "Part of the solution is greater collaboration within the community and across the District."

"This epidemic has reached the point where it will take the efforts of all of us — not only AIDS service organizations, the health departments, social service agencies, and churches — but black businesses, social and fraternal organizations, and everyday people as well."

Us Helping Us has initiated a program that involves aiming HIV-prevention efforts at 36 area barbershops. Shop owners have agreed to offer their customers free condoms, Simmons said, and a barber in each shop is trained as a peer educator to ensure that information discussed in the barbershop about HIV is accurate.

At the news conference last Friday morning, various community-based organizers described AIDS-related initiatives they have launched.

Fred Johnson, deputy director of D.C.'s needle-exchange project, said his organization regularly distributes syringes to 3,000 active injection drug users in the nation's capital. "People are still shooting dope," he noted.

Denise Outterbridge, an employee at Rap Inc., one of the oldest drug treatment programs in D.C., said "Gay and transgendered people are still being denied housing" by those who choose not to rent property to them.

Earline Budd, a transgender outreach specialist for Safe Haven Outreach Ministry Inc., said it can be difficult to help get services for the growing number of black transgendered people who are HIV-positive.

"Substance abuse seems to be a real strong issue in the transgender community," she said. "And this city has not been receptive to allowing us to take part in programs or stay at shelters."

Budd, who was diagnosed with HIV in 1991, said transgendered people are frequently shunned. "So they won't come in for help when they need it," she added.

She urged community-based organizations to be open to all people. "This is a health issue," Budd said. "And that's how it should be looked at."

Dr. Donald A. Jones, chief of the D.C. Health Department's Prevention and Support Services Division, said the black community still embraces "a laissez faire

Metro

N E W S

RAP sends apology to Solutions

At Solutions 2001, a Jan. 30 forum for discussing the state of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Washington, D.C., one group was obviously absent. Regional Addiction and Prevention Inc. had offered to act as one of the forum sponsors and had pledged \$200 to the event. But that night, there was no one from RAP, nor was there a check.

Ron Clark, executive director of RAP, said it was all a misunderstanding. In a Feb. 12 letter to Dee Curry, a transgendered HIV/AIDS activist and organizer of Solutions, Clark wrote, in part, "[T]he person with whom you had originally spoken with about participating is no longer with our organization. ... Had I known about the commitment, our organization certainly would have followed through in support of the important goals of Solutions 2001. Even though we are too late for the event, I'm enclosing the amount of the original pledge as a contribution."

While RAP's absence may simply have been a case of crossed wires, it did fan the flames of perceived homophobia and transphobia on RAP's part. During the Solutions event, Curry told the audience that she suspected RAP pulled out of the forum because she, a transgendered woman, organized it.

Earline Budd, transgender outreach coordinator for the shelter Safe Haven, a panelist at Solutions 2001 also has a measure of animosity toward RAP.

"We do have a problem getting transgendered into their program," Budd said of RAP. "We've had transgender clients and Gay male clients who've said they had problems."

Budd added of the letter Clark sent to Curry, "In no way does that letter address the concerns of how RAP treats members of the GLBT community. We have to sit down with Ron Clark and address how we can work together."

Clark said that RAP welcomes Budd's suggestion. "We'd be more than happy to do that," said Clark, adding that he knows of no cases where RAP has shown insensitivity to sexual minorities. "We're not the most educated group in all matters, for sure," Clark quipped, then added, "but we certainly try to understand and be sensitive to everybody. ... As new staff come aboard, we train our staff to be sensitive to these issues."

— Will O'Bryan

approach" when it comes to discussing HIV/AIDS and how to prevent it.

"We have an epidemic that is preventable," he said, "and most people aren't aware of it."

Jones urged black community members to create an atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable about who they are.

"Our churches need to be open to engaging people in conversations about this where they are," he said, "and not be judgmental about anything."

The D.C. health department has created a community-based program that involves training volunteers at 10 area black churches to provide HIV/AIDS counseling and testing.

"We can't continue to ignore things," Jones said. "Too long our city has been quiet about this, and that is frustrating. We need to be talking to those folks out there who are oblivious to what is going on." ▼