

/\* The President's World Aids Day Proclamation follows, together with his comments at Georgetown Medical Center on that date. \*/

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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For Immediate Release December 1, 1993

WORLD AIDS DAY, 1993

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BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

AIDS and HIV disease have cut short the lives of many Americans who had so much to contribute. They have plagued our sons and daughters, our mothers and fathers, our brothers and sisters, and our friends and co-workers. The devastating effects of AIDS have touched all of us. More than one million of our fellow citizens are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Since January 1981, more than 340,000 Americans have developed AIDS, and more than 200,000 have died from complications resulting from AIDS.

On this World AIDS Day, we recognize and are humbled by the global impact of HIV disease. The World Health Organization estimates that more than 14 million people worldwide are infected with HIV and that more than 2.5 million have developed AIDS. By the end of this century, more than 30 million people will have been infected with HIV and, of those, more than 10 million adults will have developed AIDS.

The extent of HIV infection is overwhelming, but we must not allow ourselves to despair in the face of these daunting statistics. Instead, we must accelerate our efforts to find effective treatments, a vaccine, and an eventual cure for this scourge that haunts us.

This Administration has undertaken a new commitment to AIDS research and prevention and to the development of improved care and treatment for those with HIV disease. Through the strengthened Office of AIDS Research at the National Institutes of Health, we are increasing our efforts to improve treatments

and working more effectively to find a cure for HIV and AIDS.

State governments and public health officials across our Nation have mobilized to educate the public and address the needs, not only of persons with AIDS, but also of their families and loved ones. Community-based organizations throughout the country have provided education, care programs, and support to those coping with HIV and their families. Volunteers across America, members of local service organizations, church groups, gay and lesbian service organizations, and thousands of individuals have heeded the summons to action and have given selflessly of their time and energy. Those who labor to hasten the end of this terrible epidemic deserve our deep appreciation and admiration.

Education is our most effective tool in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. We need to ensure that all Americans will protect their lives and the lives of their loved ones by making safe and healthy choices. Government alone cannot solve this crisis. We all must look deep within our souls to find the compassion, the values, the spirit, and the commitment that will allow us to conquer this modern-day plague.

I call upon every American to join in the effort to fight the spread of HIV and to treat those living with HIV with dignity and respect. We all hope and pray for the day when we discover a cure and a preventive vaccine. Until that day -- which I know will come -- we all must work together, strengthen our resolve to marshal the resources necessary to end the epidemic, and increase our compassion for those who need our help in their struggle against HIV disease.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim December 1, 1993, as World AIDS Day, and I invite the Governors of the States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, officials of other territories subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, and the American people to join me in reaffirming our commitment to combatting HIV/AIDS and to helping those living with this disease.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirtieth day of November, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and eighteenth.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT AT WORLD AIDS DAY EVENT

Georgetown University Medical Center Washington, DC

11:50 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Now, there's a guy I'd like to vote for. (Laughter.) Thank you so much, Alexander, for what you said and the way you said it and for the power of your example. Father O'Donovon, Dr. Griffith, Kristine Gebbie, ladies and gentlemen, I'm delighted to see all of you here. I thank my friend, Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton for coming.

I want to especially thank all of you here who are devoting your time and indeed your lives for the quest for a better way to deal with AIDS, and of course we hope, ultimately, a cure. I want to thank especially the people who are living with AIDS who met with me today in their hospital rooms and who walked the corridors of the hospital with me. I won't mention them all, but I met a remarkable man named Larry Singletary upstairs who was a real inspiration to me. (Applause.) And I met his grandmother who was a real inspiration to both of us. And a beautiful young woman named Jenny Dorr who walked the halls with me, who came down with me. Stand up, Jenny. (Applause.) I think my goal ought to be to see that Jenny Dorr gets to live to a ripe old age. (Applause.)

Today I think just about every American who's ever been touched by AIDS will think of people they know who have died or who have suffered family loss. I don't know if it was by accident or design, but I want to thank whoever put this part of the quilt up here with a picture of my good friend, Dan Bradley, who for many years was the national leader of the Legal Services Corporation. I have a friend who lost her mother and another friend who lost his wife to AIDS because of tainted blood transfusions; and many others.

But I want to say a special word of appreciation today for the people who are infected with HIV and the people who are living with AIDS who are committed to living; to those who work in the White House and those who work in the administration and those who, around the country, have given support to me and helped me to give some support to them. Some of them are here today. And I thank them for the power of their example and for their commitment to life.

In a funny way this whole disease is bringing out the best and the worst in America, isn't it? I mean, it's exposing some of our prejudice in ways that are self-defeating since every family and every child is now at risk. And yet it's also showing us the courage, the self-determination, the incredible capacity of the American people to give and to love. We see our legendary refusal to adopt organized and disciplined solutions to big social problems. And yet we also see, as I will document in a moment, a remarkable willingness on the part of people who can make a difference to try to do more.

On Monday I met with several religious leaders who are responding in their own way to the AIDS crisis; people who are largely involved in caring for people with AIDS, many of whom are also involved courageously for them in trying to educate our children in the schools to prevent AIDS.

And I was impressed with the wide variety of religious perspectives. We had conservative evangelicals around the breakfast table with the liberal rabbis, mainstream Protestant ministers, Catholic clergy. Every one of them, however, agreed on at least two things: One is that it is the moral high ground for people of faith to care for people with AIDS; and the moral low ground to run away from it.

And the second thing, and perhaps even more important over the long run, is that it is not only ethical conduct, but an ethical obligation to speak openly with people, especially young people, about what they must do and not do in order to avoid becoming infected.

There was a Methodist bishop, Fritz Mutti, Topeka, Kansas, who lost two of his sons to AIDS -- two -- who spoke about these obligations. He talked about how he and his wife had worked against their own fear and loneliness to bring out their personal experience in a way that would give power to their efforts to deal with the crisis before us.

I met Reverend Steve Pieters, who has been living with AIDS for more than a decade now, one of America's longest survivors, explaining how he stays alive through hope and through his own faith.

For nearly every American with eyes and ears open, the face of AIDS is no longer the face of a stranger. Millions and millions of us have now stood at the bedside of a dying friend, and grieved. Millions and millions of us now know people who have had AIDS and who have died of it who are both gay and heterosexual -- both. Millions and millions of us are now forced to admit that this is a problem which has diminished the life of every American.

And as I enter this battle next year to try to provide for the first time in this history of this country affordable and quality health benefits for all Americans, millions and millions of us know that one of the reasons we have such an expensive health care system, even though it doesn't do as much in terms of coverages, any other major country's health care system, is that we pay a terrible price for the rate of AIDS that we have in this country and the cost that it imposed because we don't do more on the front end.

On Sunday, the cover story in The New York Times Sunday Magazine was written by a journalist named Jeffrey Schmalz, who lived, and just a couple of weeks ago, died with AIDS. He was a remarkable man who interviewed me in a very piercing way when I was running for president. I was impressed then with the totally frank, almost brutal and unsentimental nature of the interview in which we engaged -- (laughter) -- and with the quality of his mind and spirit and the precision of his questions.

If you saw the article or you heard about it, you know that basically what the article said was AIDS is sort of receding in the public consciousness as a thing to be passionate about; that it was true not only in our administration, but in the community at large and even in the gay community. That was the theory of the article. And I think he was saying that it was -- people were just frustrated dealing with what they considered to be a perpetually uphill battle. Not that it was politically unacceptable anymore to talk about AIDS or deal with it, but that there just seemed to be no pay-off. And so he said -- he challenged us all with these words in the article: "I am dying. Why doesn't someone help us?"

I have to say to you that I think that is a good question and a good challenge. I do believe that all of us, each in our own way, sometimes just want to go on to other things. Even some of my friends who are infected just want to go on to other things --

maybe especially them. They just get sick of talking about it and thinking about it and focusing on it.

The purpose of this day is to remind us that our attitudes, behavior and passion should be revved up in the other 364 days of the year.

(Audience Interruption.)

THE PRESIDENT: It's okay. It's all right. (Applause.) It's all right.

Last night -- let me change the subject a minute and get back to it. Last night I went to see Schindler's List. We had a special showing of it for the Holocaust Museum. And it's not going to be a highly advertised movie and it's coming out around Christmastime. It will be tough for people to see this. I implore every one of you to go see it. It is an astonishing thing.

Schindler's List -- it's about a non-Jew who, as a member of the Nazi Party, saved over 1,000 Jews by his personal efforts in World War II from the Holocaust. The reason I say that is this: Part of my job is to be a lightning rod. Part of my job is to lift the hopes and aspirations of the American people, knowing that as long as you're trying to lift hopes and lift aspirations you can never fully close the gap between what you're reaching for and what you're actually doing; and knowing for sure that there's no way I can now keep everybody alive who already has AIDS. So the fact that he's in here expressing his frustration to me means at least that they expect me to do something, which is a step forward. (Applause.) I don't take it personally. (Applause.)

The reason I ask you to go see the movie is you will see portrait after portrait after portrait of the painful difference between people who have no hope and have no rage left and people who still have hope and still have rage. I'd rather that man be in here screaming at me than having given up altogether. Much rather. (Applause.)

So let me go forward and tell you what we're trying to do and let me then invite you to tell me what else we should do;

because that's really what I came here to do today -- to say, here's what we have done in a year and to invite you to tell me what else we should do.

I think, first of all, it's clear that this administration has made a significant financial effort, as the Schmalz article pointed out in The New York Times. We've increased programs for prevention by \$45 million, a very substantial increase. What we still need to do is to convince people who do the preventing that they ought to do it where the people are who need the information. We must, we must, we must convince more people to reach the children where the children are in the schools. (Applause.) And where the adults are in the workplace.

I have directed every federal office to provide its employees with education about AIDS prevention. We asked the 3 million federal employees to take the information home to their families and to their communities. I have challenged every business to take similar action; but not every business, and certainly not every school is doing it.

We can deny the reality that every family is at risk until we know someone who is, but we do so at great peril to ourselves. We've increased the research funding for AIDS by over 20 percent; and we increased funding in the Ryan White Health Care Act for care by 66 percent. And I want to remind you that this was at a time when overall domestic spending was held absolutely flat; and

went over 350 items in the federal budget this year are smaller than they were last year -- where there was an absolute cut -- we got substantial increases. Why? Because again, I say this shows the best and the worst about the country, a reluctance to deal with the problem; the absence of a systematic approach at every community level; but the understanding in Congress that even though we've got to slash a lot of the funding we have for various programs to reduce the deficit, we had to do more here. And I frankly think the Congress deserves a lot of credit for doing it at a very difficult time when many people said that the politically smart thing was to cut everything no matter what, and no matter what the consequences. So I feel good about that. And I think you should feel good about that.

We do have a National AIDS Policy Coordinator. We do have an effort going now that we announced yesterday to see what we can do to slash the rules and the regulations and the bureaucracy to move drugs to people more quickly, to see what will work and what will help. And that is terribly important.

We are marshalling more resources and making more efforts. But there must be other things we can do. The theme of the World AIDS Day is "Time to Act." The argument that Jeffrey Schmaltz made in his article was that we also ought to talk more. And for those of us in positions of leadership, talking is acting.

I have to tell you that one of the things that I underestimated when I became President was the actual power of the words coming from the bully pulpit of the White House to move the country. I overestimated my capacity to get things done in a hurry in the Congress -- (laughter) -- but I -- when I read the other day in The Los Angeles Times that I had the best record of any President in 40 years, I said, "pity the others." (Laughter.) I'm an impatient person; I'm a victim of my own impatience. But I do think sometimes all of us underestimate the power of our words to change the attitudes and the range of behavior of other people -- not just me, but you, too.

And it is clear to me that no matter how much we put into research, no matter how much we put into treatment, no matter how much we put into education, someone besides the politicians will do the research, the treatment and the education. And it has to be a daily thing.

The next thing I'd like to say is, I think the best thing we can do for people who are living with HIV and living with AIDS is to pass a comprehensive health care plan so that people do not lose their benefits. (Applause.) That is important -- and let me say that is important for two reasons. One is obvious. One is what I saw in the hospital rooms up there when I asked people, you know, or they had already prepared to tell me: How is your care being paid for? Where do you live? Do you still have a place to live? Do you have a job to go back to if you get well enough to go back? What is the circumstance of your life.

The first thing is just simply having the security of knowing that there will be a payment stream to cover quality care. But the second thing, I think, is also important. And that is the point I began this talk with, which is that we have to affirm the lives of people who are infected and the living. And if you know that you have health insurance that can never be taken away and that the cost of it will not vary because you will be insured in a big community pool with people who are not infected and therefore whose real costs are lower. Then there is never an incentive for someone to fire you or not to hire you. That is important. That's a big part of therapy in any kind of



problem -- being able to live to the fullest of your God-given capacities -- to work, to go, to do.

And it would be good for the economy, by the way, to know that nobody had to be put off to the side or there were no incentives not to maximize the capacity of every person who lives in the country -- so that this health care issue -- the providing the security -- is not just important for having the funding stream for the health care, it's also important to make sure that we are liberating the potential of people who want to work and contribute for as long as they can. It is a huge deal.

And I hope when we begin this debate in earnest next year that those of you who work in this area, either in the care of people with AIDS or those of you who are part of the activist community, will make sure that both those points get made to the United States Congress. We have too many people in this country with a contribution to make to the rest of us and to the whole, dying to make it, who can't because of the crazy quilt health system we've got. (Applause.) And I think we should do it.

Finally, let me just say that there is a lot of talk always, and I have been part of this, talking about how each of us has to take personal responsibility for our own conduct. And I believe that. But if you want children to do that, they have to be educated as to the consequences of their conduct. Which means someone else has to do it. And it is also true that since literally every American can be affected in some way by this, all the rest of us have personal responsibilities, too. And so again I say to you, I think we have done a good job in the first year of this administration if you measure good job in terms of organizing ourselves properly, funding the effort more adequately, identifying some of the major problems in the bureaucracy and going after them.

But Jeffrey Schmalz, in his last article, issued a rebuke to me. He said, you cannot let this slide as an issue until it is over. And he was right. But he also issued a rebuke to everyone else in the country -- everyone else. This is an issue. If you just look at the sheer numbers; if you look at what is happening in some African countries; if you look at what is happening in other nations around the world; if you had no other concern in your own country but the cold-blooded one of how your own country was going to pay for its collective health care need and deal with its economic crises -- if that was your only concern, if you never had a heartbeat of compassion, you would have to be nearly obsessed with this problem.

And so I say to you, my fellow Americans, tonight when I go home, I will see the face of Alexander. And I will wish that someday he will be able to give that speech on his own behalf. He deserves that chance. I will see the face of Jenny, and I will want her to live to a ripe old age. And all of us -- all of us have something we can do. I invite you to tell me what else you think I can do, and to ask yourselves what else you can do.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END12:17 P.M. EST