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Events - 6/1999 - Celebrate 5th Annual National HIV Testing Day

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EVENT - 6/99 -
Celebrate 5TH
Annual Nat'l
H W Tasting Day

NAPWA Luncheon Address
Keynote
Monday, June 21 @ 11:30 AM
Rayburn House Office Building, Banquet Rooms B338-339

15 – 20 minutes

Purpose The event is being held in recognition of National HIV Testing Day, and to present the 1999 Life Awards to The City of Chicago and POZ Magazine.

Host Congresswoman Donna Christian-Christensen

Points

- **Introduction: Roger Gooden**, Chair, NAPWA Board of Directors;
- **Recognize: Congresswoman Donna Christian-Christensen, Dr. Earl Fox, Dr. Helene Gayle, Dr. Joseph O'Neill;**
- **Quickly Congratulate:** POZ Magazine (recently published a issue on AIDS in Africa) and the City of Chicago, including their commissioner of health and other representatives;
- 3 – 4 minutes of overview from your perspective as ‘their leader’. The usual ‘This is where we are....’, both nationally and internationally;
- A short focus on the international epidemic - the fact that most developing countries are not able to deal with the consequences of something like ‘HIV Testing Day’ in terms of access to treatment, etc. This will help the audience appreciate the importance of this day in the US;
- Balance of time should be spent focusing on why HIV Testing Day is so important in the United States where we have the advances to deal with a ‘positive’ result;
- We have a duty to make sure that people who are tested are able to access treatment and care. We need greater healthcare opportunities – point out what the challenges currently are with respect to prevention and treatment;
- What is the Administration doing? Particularly with regard to people of color?; and
- Conclude by mentioning that the Administration is pleased to be in partnership with the CBC (the newly incurred funds are supporting this year’s HIV Testing Day).

CBC

Remarks by Sandra Thurman, Director
Office of National AIDS Policy
National HIV Testing Day
June 21, 1999

Thank you so much Roger – and thank you all for inviting me to join you here today to recognize and celebrate the 5th Annual National HIV Testing Day. My thanks to all our friends at NAPWA, Cornelius and Terry, who have made this campaign possible – you continue to bring the vitally important prevention message to millions of Americans.

I would like to congratulate our two award recipients: POZ Magazine and the City of Chicago, including their reamarkable health commissioner, Sheila Lyne.

I would like to recognize, in particular, Congresswoman Donna Christian-Christensen. On behalf of all those living with and affected by AIDS, thank you for your support and your advocacy – it is so wonderful to have you here today. You are a role model for leadership, reaching out to our communities and helping to ensure that our nation knows its status. I would also like to give a special thanks to some of my distinguished colleagues who are able to join us today - Dr. Earl Fox from HRSA, Dr. Helene Gayle from CDC, and Dr. Joseph O'Neill from HRSA.

The news about HIV and AIDS on the home front continues to be mixed. The good news is that new and better drugs are allowing many people infected with HIV or who have AIDS to live longer and healthier lives. The bad news is that the epidemic continues to shift dramatically to women, people of color and young people. More than 50% of all new infections in this country are in people under 25...1 in 4 of those are teenagers. And while we have seen a dramatic decline in AIDS cases and AIDS deaths we have seen virtually no decline in the

number of new infections. We still have a tremendous amount of work to do in the good old US of A.

Most of us can remember back to the days when there was little hope, when ignorance and indifference were the rule and not the exception, when knowing your HIV status meant using losing your job, your home, or your health insurance - and when treatments were desperate and unproved. We have come long way on this journey called AIDS, building new bridges across old boundaries and joining hands in protest.

But we must be clear about where we are today.

We must address the continuing misperception that AIDS is a disease primarily of gay white men – HIV is an equal opportunity assailant. It is increasingly an epidemic of youth and of women. And an epidemic of communities of color. As a nation, we must come to grips with the fact that our epidemic has come to mirror the global pandemic. As a nation, we have just begun to realize that the epidemic here in the United States is only a small wave in the torrent of the global pandemic sweeping across the globe.

For instance in Africa, AIDS is a plague of biblical proportion, and is claiming more lives than all of the wars in this century combined. While many of us have witnessed its devastation, it is almost impossible to grasp the grip that AIDS has on villages across Africa and on many of your cities as well.

Today and every day, in Africa, AIDS buries more than 5,500 women, men, and children, and that number will more than double in the next few years. AIDS is now the leading cause of death among all people of all ages in Africa -- and among young adult African-American men here in the United States.

And yet, the epidemic rages on. Each day, 11,000 people in Africa become HIV infected—one every 8 seconds. Most of these new infections are among young people, under the age of 25. And by 2005, more than 100 million people worldwide will be HIV positive.

Yet amidst this tragedy is hope. Amidst this crisis is the opportunity to empower women, to protect children, and to support families and communities in the battle against AIDS. In villages across Africa, efforts are being made to stem the rising tide of HIV infection, to prolong the lives of those who are sick, and to stitch together a tapestry of family supports for the growing millions of children orphaned by AIDS.

During my recent trip to Sub-Saharan Africa, I met one of the most incredible women I have ever known. Her name is Bernadette and she is a 70 year old grandmother who has buried 11 of her 12 children to AIDS and is now caring for 38 of her grandchildren. Each day, she walks a mile and a half each way to gather fresh water, carrying it back to her small, crowded hut. Then she starts the work of tending to the pigs, the chickens, and the produce in her small garden to help pay for food, shelter, and school fees for her 35 grandchildren.

Bernadette asked me to walk with her into her back yard so she could show me the graves of her loved ones. But even amidst the tragedy of losing her children, Bernadette found a way to get each of her 35 grandchildren tested – and continues to fight for care and treatment for the 5 that were found to be positive. Thankfully, Bernadette has been lucky enough to find a network of support for her family. Most of our global community is not so lucky.

This is a story not slowly nearing its end but rather a huge tragedy, just beginning to unfold. We are not at the beginning of the end of AIDS, but rather at the end of the beginning.

Together, we must find ways in which the struggle against AIDS in our nation can be joined with the larger struggle against AIDS across our world.

We must also be vigilant against the growing misperception that AIDS is no longer a lethal threat, a misperception that comes more easily to a nation weary from an eighteen year struggle. When magazines run cover stories on the miraculous cure of Magic Johnson from AIDS instead of celebrating his successful treatment, we must stand up and we must speak out.

And when charlatans and media magnets perpetuate useless drugs or disproved theories, we must stand up and we must speak out.

When the rhetoric of politicians drowns out the reasoned arguments of public health experts, we must stand up and we must speak out.

When the sanctimonious seek to withhold prevention information that can save our children's lives, we must stand up and we must speak out.

And when our leaders turn their backs on the epidemic beyond our borders, we must stand up and we must speak out.

For we have an obligation to speak out for those who cannot, to raise our voices on behalf of those who depend on us for action, but whose distance

We must remember that AIDS remains a preventable disease. Today, we are confronted with 300,000 to 400,000 Americans who do not know their HIV status. Without medical care, treatment and support these individuals are at increased risk for an early death and putting others in jeopardy of transmission.

Effective prevention efforts, both here at home and in the global community, can give people the skills they need to stay safe and remain healthy. National HIV Testing day has allowed us the opportunity to become proactive, the opportunity to give individuals the benefit of early treatments that will advance their quality of life and slow disease progression.

That is why National Testing Day is so vitally important. We must encourage everyone who might be at risk to get tested – and to get treatment. And it is our responsibility to join the two in a way that guarantees that no American falls through the cracks.

Today there are more testing options than ever before. Getting tested for HIV is easier and quicker. We have blood tests, oral tests, urine tests – tests that can be available to anyone in any kind of setting. We must encourage people from San Francisco to Saratoga to get tested for HIV – and to take control of their help. “Take the Test, Take Control”.

All of us who have worked so hard to save lives should feel proud of our accomplishments, and mindful of the many colleagues we have lost along the way. Yet we must also be mindful of the work left to be done here and across the globe.

This past October, the President, Secretary Shalala, Surgeon General Satcher, and I joined representatives from the Congressional Black Caucus to announce a new effort to address HIV and AIDS in the African American and other minority communities. This initiative is founded on both the new funding and the new energy, making additional dollars available to bring the total effort to \$156 million.

This is a tremendously exciting initiative, both because it will help build the capacity of the community to identify and respond to its own needs and because it may well serve as a catalyst for ensuring that the remaining billions of dollars in funding for AIDS-related care and prevention are more effectively used. It has the potential, the potential, to galvanize a broad-based community response, and to make participation in the fight against AIDS a moral imperative for all America--and not just a relatively few.

And in this context, the importance of voluntary counseling and testing cannot be overstated. Voluntary counseling and testing are vital prevention tools and they are essential bridges to treatment. We must seek to make this service – accessible, available, and culturally appropriate. It must be family and user friendly. And it must avoid mandatory one-size-fits-all approaches that could drive this epidemic back underground.

Your presence here and your dedication to ensuring that our communities know their status have proved to the nation that we are here to stay and we will continue to fight till the end. You have gained the attention of key law makers on capital hill and have continued to push for prevention as a priority even amidst the chaos in Washington.

I want you to know that I am truly committed to doing everything within my power to turn our collective potential into reality by helping to feed the momentum that has brought us this far. I join the President and the Vice President in thanking you for your tremendous efforts, and in urging you to continue to do all you can to stem the tide of this pandemic – and get care for those caught in its path. I also want to ask that you continue to push us to do what is right and to

give voice to the voiceless. Our shared challenge must unite us and our determination must lead us on. Thank you.