

OPINION

72 cents

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All Americans need to take AIDS more seriously

The notion that African Americans have shied away from the AIDS issue is factual but has been overstated in many cases.

Americans in general, be they black, white or any shade in between, have not overly enthusiastic to embrace the fight against AIDS or people living with the disease. The folks who stonewalled and sat around idly while AIDS was reaching epidemic proportions in this country were not black. The politicians and decision makers who had the power to act sooner but were instead led in a different direction by ignorance and hatred were made up of the same good ol' boys network that still exists today, and only few non-whites get membership cards to that club.

Even now when more information and science than ever exist about AIDS, we don't see hordes of people running to AIDS shelters breaking down the doors to volunteer. We have not seen real, everyday Americans truly take a stand or an interest in the disease, even though more evidence than ever tells us that many of us are vulnerable to this disease, regardless of sexual orientation.

To say that blacks have been afraid to broach the subject of AIDS is only partly true. The battle is larger than trying to convince the black community to take an interest. There are other fronts, where many, many more non-blacks want to be enlightened about AIDS.

Yes, there is a great amount of ignorance that exists in the black community about AIDS. Some of us don't trust science and believe that the disease can be contracted through day-to-day interac-

tion; other blacks wrap their disdain for AIDS and people living with it around Bible verses or quotes from their pastors.

At a recent forum to discuss AIDS and the black church, only a handful of local religious leaders bothered to show. Their apparent lack of interest only bolsters the notion that blacks refuse to address AIDS. But by making such a notion, we are assuming that if a similar meeting were held with white pastors, more of them would take an interest, which is quite an assumption.

Locally, we have seen members of the white faith community take aim at homosexual students in the school system in the last few months. So it's fair to say that there are some non-black faith leaders who are reluctant as well.

AIDS education and enlightenment should be moved up the priority list in the black community because the disease is running rampant through our neighborhoods. But let's not forget to school others, like the politicians in Washington who have the power to make the battle against AIDS a more level fight.

Many blacks do not take an interest in AIDS for the same reasons they do not take an interest in colon cancer, heart disease and many other issues. They are too occupied with surviving and trying to make ends meet to focus on such topics. Most of the time, it has nothing to do with being bigoted or afraid.

So to continue the stigma that the black community is ignoring AIDS is unfair. The nation and in many cases the world are ignoring AIDS to the detriment of citizens.



Media biased against liberals



George E. Curry
Guest Columnist

Veteran CBS News correspondent Bernard Goldberg charges in his best-selling book that the news media are biased. He is correct. But his underlining premise is incorrect: The bias is against liberals, not conservatives. Goldberg's book, "Bias," is getting a lot of play these days because journalists are bending over backward to show that they are not biased against a book critical of their industry. However, few have done the research necessary to determine whether Goldberg's view of the media is valid or poppycock.

Fortunately, Geoffrey Nunberg, a researcher at the Center for the Study of Language and Information at Stanford University, has done the much-needed research. His findings reveal a lot about the media and its practice of labeling political progressives and conservatives.

Goldberg writes that when he first joined CBS News in 1981, he "noticed that we pointedly identified conservatives, for example, but for some crazy reason we didn't bother to identify liberals as liberals."

Because it's cumbersome, if not impossible, to do a study of the words uttered on all of the network television news shows, Nunberg did the next best thing: He went to an electronic data base of major newspapers to see if Goldberg has a valid complaint.

The researcher took the names of well-known legislators, judges, entertainers and national organizations and compared how they were described in the media. In every category, a person was far more likely to be labeled a liberal than a conservative.

"The average liberal legislator has a 30 percent greater likelihood

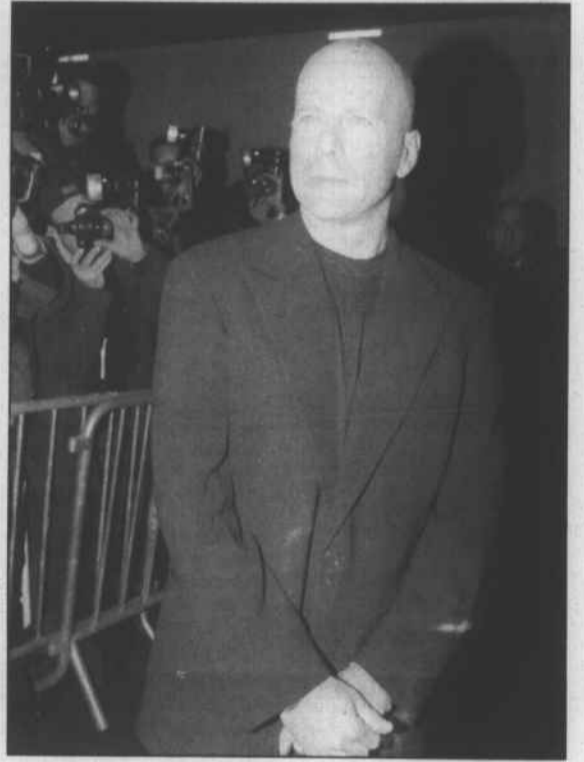
of being identified with a partisan label than the average conservative does," Nunberg said. "The press describes Barney Frank as a liberal two-and-a-half times as frequently as it describes Dick Arney as a conservative. It gives Barbara Boxer a partisan label almost twice as often as it gives one to Trent Lott. And while it isn't surprising that the press applies the label conservative to Jesse Helms more often than to any other Republican in the group, it describes Paul Wellstone as a liberal 20 percent more frequently than that."

Nunberg didn't stop there. "At first I wondered whether I had inadvertently included a bunch of conservative newspapers in my sample," he admitted. "So I did the same search in just three newspapers that are routinely accused of having a liberal bias, The New York Times, The Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times. Interestingly, those papers tend to use labels of both sorts slightly less than the other papers do. But even there, the liberals get partisan labels 30 percent more often than conservatives do, the same proportion as in the press at large."

In his book, Goldberg argues that actors Tom Selleck and Bruce Willis are frequently identified as conservatives but Barbara Streisand and Rob Reiner are not usually referred to as liberals.

"But Goldberg's dead wrong there, too," Nunberg found. "The press gives partisan labels to Streisand and Reiner almost five times as frequently as it does to Selleck and Willis. For that matter, Warren Beatty gets a partisan label twice as often as Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Norman Lear gets one more frequently than Charles Heston does."

Said Nunberg: "It's the same with other figures. Goldberg claims that Robert Bork is always called a conservative whereas Laurence Tribe is just identified as a Harvard law professor, but when you look at the data, it turns out that the two are labeled with



Bruce Willis is known for his conservative political views.

almost exactly the same frequency. Supreme Court Justice Paul Stevens is identified as a liberal more often than Justices Rehnquist, Scalia or Thomas are identified as conservatives. And the columnist Michael Kinsley gets a partisan label slightly more often than George Will goes."

Nunberg's findings were first broadcast as commentary on National Public Radio's "Fresh Air" and can be found on the Internet at <http://www-csli.stanford.edu/%7Enunberg/bias.html>.

Labeling or, more accurately, mislabeling is only one of the media's misdeeds. Equally troubling is how the media have adopted the language of the right wing when describing affirmative action.

Whether it's print or broadcast, the media are quick to refer to "race-based" or "gender-based" college admissions. In fact, no university in America accepts students based solely on their race or gender. Race and gender are among many factors colleges use when considering qualified applicants. It would be more accurate to refer to "race-sensitive" or "gender-conscious" policies rather than use the buzz words of the far right. Conservatives, as we have seen, are the real beneficiaries of bias in the media.

George E. Curry, editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com, is former editor of Emerge: Black America's Newsmagazine.

Government waste



Armstrong Williams
Guest Columnist

April 15 seems like a good time to ask, what is the government doing with the money it takes from us in taxes?

That's the question I put to David Williams, vice president for policy at Citizens Against Government Waste, a nonpartisan organization that educates the public about government mismanagement. His response was straightforward: The government is wasting billions of taxpayer dollars in mismanagement and outright fraud.

An analysis of the 2001 federal budget conducted by his organization calculates that the government squandered \$20.1 billion last year in "pork," or programs that use our tax dollars to benefit special interests. The jig goes something like this: Congressmen pump federal money into wealthy companies who in turn fill the legislators' coffers with campaign contributions and important projects in their home districts.

"This is illegal appropriations and it's not what they were sent to

Washington to do," Williams said. Sadly, annual surveys conducted by Citizens Against Government Waste indicate that "pork" spending has nearly doubled over the past seven years. Williams thinks the trend will continue at a cost of billions to taxpayers.

Some of the more egregious examples include the Farm Security Act, a \$73 billion hike in agricultural subsidies enacted with the ostensible purpose of aiding impoverished farmers. However, restrictions that link these subsidies to select crops and total acreage ensure that wealthy farm owners, corporate executives and even other legislators benefit the most. For example, basketball star Scottie Pippen and billionaires Charles Schwab, David Rockefeller and Ted Turner each received six-digit farm subsidies over the past five years.

"Agriculture policy has become an exercise in 'trickle-up' economics - taxing working Americans to subsidize the wealthiest farms," observed a recent report from The Heritage Foundation, a Washington, D.C. think tank.

According to a forthcoming report by the Citizens Against Government Waste, money

appropriated for AIDS prevention is regularly funneled into questionable social programs. For example, STOP Aids project of San Francisco received nearly \$700,000 from the Centers for Disease Control in 2001. Some of the subsidies were used to sponsor a seminar on "how to make your man tremble with delight." In October, the project sponsored a seminar for men "curious about leather and fetish sex."

"Flirting classes and orgasm coaches, that's not prevention," said Williams, who suggests that the money would be better served by spending it on safe sex campaigns or education initiatives in Third World countries.

Other examples of government waste range from \$50,000 for a tattoo removal program in California to Joel-Peter Witkin's National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) subsidized photographs of severed limbs. From rice subsidies used to fatten the wallets of the wealthy to CDC workshops on sexual gratification, the list of government waste goes on endlessly and senselessly.

"We're trying to shame these people (legislators) into realizing that they're robbing the treasury. This is illegal appropriations and it's not what they were sent to

Washington to do," Williams demanded.

It does not matter. New government programs designed to solicit a favorable reaction from the press and constituents continue to be layered upon the old without any general standard for measuring their success. Consequently, the bureaucracy grows ever larger with the inevitable result of duplication, mismanagement and general waste so pervasive that it costs taxpayers billions of dollars a year.

Perhaps we can't solve all of society's problems. But a good start would be creating rules of accountability for those agencies charged with spending our tax dollars to improve the quality of our lives. That means linking federal funding to some base line of accountability for government agencies. That means eliminating those agencies that fail to demonstrate their worth, and rewarding those that achieve their professed goals.

This tax season seems as good a time as any to demand that the government stop lining its pork barrels with our tax dollars.

www.armstrongwilliams.com

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