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Metrolina AIDS Project

National Notes

by David Prybylo
Q-Notes Staff

Feds release new AIDS education campaign

WASHINGTON, DC—The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) today launched its series of new radio and television public service announcements (PSAs) targeting sexually active young people who are at increased risk for HIV infection. The PSAs are part of a revamped CDC HIV prevention program and mark the initiation of federally funded PSAs that explicitly discuss condom use on television and radio.

The PSAs are the most visible component of the CDC's new Prevention Marketing Initiative to prevent the sexual transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among young people.

"The AIDS community has fought for years for wide distribution of explicit, targeted AIDS education," said Daniel T. Bross, AIDS Action Council executive director. "In the past, the CDC has told people that the way to prevent AIDS is to 'put your socks on.' Euphemisms such as these have limited value; the high rate of death among young adults due to AIDS tells us that we need a far more sensible approach to public health." AIDS is the leading cause of death among men, ages 25-44, and the fourth leading cause of death among women, ages 25-44.

"The PSAs, along with the CDC's assertions that condoms are effective in preventing HIV infection, mark a significant break from the past," Bross added. "The new CDC initiative is a long overdue first step in what the AIDS community hopes will be a fresh start for the CDC's HIV prevention program. At the same time, we believe that the networks and local affiliates and radio stations have an obligation to air these and other, more frank announcements."

Gay AIDS activists unhappy with new campaign

WASHINGTON, DC—Three days after the CDC announced its new AIDS prevention marketing campaign, gay AIDS activists set fire to a copy of the initiative at a press conference held outside the office of National AIDS Policy Coordinator Kristine Gebbie. The initiative, which was unveiled January 4 by Gebbie and Donna Shalala, Secretary of Health and Human Services, includes several public service announcements (PSAs) for television and radio targeted at young people age 18-25. The PSAs encourage young

people to "use condoms correctly" or abstain from sexual intercourse.

The new initiative is drawing fire from gay AIDS activists because it fails to target gay and bisexual men in any of its PSAs designed to encourage condom use. Gay men account for roughly 51% of the people infected with HIV in the United States and activists are outraged that the prevention campaign does not target this at-risk population.

"We've been left out and left to die," stated Luke Sissyfag, a D.C. AIDS activist who, on World AIDS day, confronted President Clinton during a speech on AIDS. Sissyfag, who set fire to the plan, continued, "This is not a bold new prevention initiative, it's a slap in the face. It's homophobic. To launch an AIDS prevention program that does not include gay and bisexual men in criminal. AIDS is not letting up in the gay community. If this administration was serious about saving lives it would include gay men."

The new initiative is also receiving criticism for not being explicit enough in its message. "To tell people to 'use a condom consistently and correctly' and not show a condom, how to put it on or inform the viewer what correctly means is dangerous. Telling people to learn the facts doesn't tell them the facts. The next wave of infections will be because of Shalala's failure to act decisively," Sissyfag said. Many activists are concerned that the PSAs instruct people to use a condom correctly but do not show one or make any mention of only using water based lubricants. Activists also say that very few people will call the information number to order the mentioned educational pamphlet and that air time would be better used presenting the information out front.

AIDS activists feel that if the Clinton administration was committed to prevention of HIV it would implement a federally coordinated condoms in schools and prisons program as well as legalize and fund needle exchange efforts. "Anything less is just smoke and mirrors," said AIDS activist Tom Kortos.

American Airlines boycott endorsed

WASHINGTON, DC—In a unanimous decision, representatives of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Organizing Committee for Stonewall 25, agreed to endorse a boycott of American Airlines called by ACT UP/Washington. In addition to the endorsement, mem-

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Between the Covers

More gossip than analysis

Contested Closets: The Politics and Ethics of Outing
By Larry Gross
University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
\$44.95 288 pages

by Jonathan Padgett
Special to Q-Notes

In *Contested Closets*, Larry Gross confronts the controversial subject of outing, apparently in an effort to estimate outing's true long-term significance—if any—in late 20th century American culture. Unfortunately, as the author himself admits in his preface, outing is not yet a closed subject. Like other issues of gay identity in the 1990s, the story of outing continues daily. So, instead of being able to provide the complete history and impact of outing, Gross can only provide commentary on selected events that occurred prior to the book's completion in 1992.

Gross explores most of the crucial topics of outing—in the media, the entertainment industry, the military, the political arena—with an odd and somewhat imposing style of mini-chapters that are titled like essays, but are really little more than extensive quotes and documentations. Sections of the book, like "The Pentagon Provides a Poster Boy"

or "Frying the Big Media fish," almost betray Gross' background and perspective from the academic field of communications, but it seems that Gross could not decide if he was writing an academic analysis or simply consolidating the gossip recently generated on who is or is not gay. Readers of *Contested Closets* may also stumble over Gross' unwieldy use of footnotes which are prone to continue lengthy discussion from the main text rather than provide brief background information.

Since a large basis for outing is debate and gossip, Gross also chose to include reprints of original articles from both the mainstream press—*Time*, *Chicago Tribune*—and alternatives like *Village Voice* and *OutWeek*. Out of what could either be a strange homage or just a recognition of his significance, several key articles written by Michelangelo Signorile in *OutWeek* are collected under the heading, "The Pope of Outing."

Ultimately, *Contested Closets* fails to provide what may need to be a more objective and concise analysis of outing. Like outing's players he describes, Gross seems driven by the urgency for immediate progress in the gay community's health and equality. *Contested Closets*, perhaps by design, answers few questions and fuels an ongoing debate; and while the subject of outing is certainly worthy of analytical discussion, Gross' contribution doesn't seem to fit the bill.