

Grassroots effort to reduce AIDS in U.S.

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Citing statistics from the Centers for Disease and Control, Wilson said that there are 650,000 black people in the U.S. living with AIDS - a little more than half of all cases nationally.

"We are here this afternoon to launch a national Black mass AIDS mobilization with a goal of reversing the epidemic in black America by 2011, just five years from now," Wilson stated. "We realize this is an ambitious goal - some might say unrealistic. We believe anything less would be immoral."

One by one, after explaining how their organizations would contribute to the war on AIDS, the leaders each signed a large poster board patterned after the original U.S. Declaration of Independence on a brown, weathered paper background with Old English lettering.

Bond said although the NAACP has been in the fight since 1998, they know they

must do more. He said the NAACP would send delegates to every future International AIDS Conference, provide HIV screenings at all seven of its regional conferences and at the national convention and lobby for the reauthorization of the Ryan White Care Act, federal legislation that provides funding for, among other things, uninsured HIV patients.

The NAACP's newest initiative, Bond said was to heavily promote mandatory HIV testing on prisoner's entering and exiting America's correctional facilities.

"We can't accept that healthy men and women enter our systems for short stays on minor charges or longer stays for serious charges and then are released with a death sentence from which there is no pardon or parole," he said.

Sandra Goodridge, director of Health-Quality of Life pro-

grams for the National Urban League, said the civil rights group would also launch more testing programs and would participate actively in World AIDS Day and the National Day of Service.

Understanding that black women have started to become infected with HIV/AIDS at rapid rates, Cheryl Cooper, executive director of the National Council of Negro Women, said they would use their resources and join with the Coalition of 100 Black Women and the Black AIDS institute this year to reach out to Black women.

"Unbelievably, 68 percent of women newly infected with HIV are African American women, our women," Cooper said.

Pernessa Seele, founder of the Balm in Gilead, explained that while stigma and reluctance to discuss HIV and AIDS in black churches still exist, her organization has

united thousands of congregations across the nation.

"I am happy to say that we have not done all that we can do, but we're going to do more," Seele said.

She said the most recent gain is the AME, AME Zion and CME churches signing on with Balm in Gilead to have health coordinators for every Episcopal district in the U.S.

In the black media, National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service Editor George E. Curry pointed out that NNPA syndicates a column by Phill Wilson and has provided extensive coverage of the pandemic.

Speaking after one panelist admitted that he was openly gay, Curry said, "I am a straight black man and the issue is not whether one is straight or gay. The issue is whether we're going to save lives."

Waters, who is known for her in-your-face style, including being an advocate for needle-exchange programs and being vocal about the ineffectiveness of the U.S.'s "abstinence only" policies, said that when it comes to AIDS, she's actually been too mild.

"I'm taking the gloves off. I'm not so nice about this anymore," she said.

Waters also stressed the importance of HIV testing in the corrections system and said she is fighting on Capitol Hill to make that happen. She also said that in addition to the need to reauthorize the Ryan White Care Act, money for another massive federally funded AIDS program - the Minority AIDS Initiative - is also dwindling while the need is growing.

Waters said the initiative got as much as \$156 million in 1999 but funding was stagnant during the Bush administration. She and 119 members of Congress are currently pushing to appropriate \$610 million to the initiative,

to properly care for blacks, Hispanics, Asian and Native Americans struggling with the disease.

She also pointedly challenged the pharmaceutical industry, urging them to assume a more active role in combating HIV and AIDS.

But before any government or corporate support can take

place, Waters explained it starts with individual commitments.

"Get your heads out of the sand and understand you are just as vulnerable as anybody else," she said. "First, take responsibility so that we can demand from others that they take responsibility."

2006 'doll test' results similar

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school program supported by HBO.

The video taped doll test resulted from a collection of writings Davis had compiled on issues of importance to black girls in her high school. In that writing, she noticed that complexion was a recurring theme.

"I knew what my friends were going through. These standards of beauty just kept coming up," Davis said in an interview with NNPA News Service. "I thought it was an issue that needed to be exposed more, although at times it seemed too taboo to talk about. But I thought a film would just put it all out there and cause discussion."

In realizing that so many dark-skinned girls have been told that lighter or whiter skin is more beautiful, Davis decided to drive home her point by conducting the doll study.

"You could tell these people about the standards of beauty that are forced on young girls all you want to. But they won't get it until you show them," she said.

And that, she did. The children are from a Harlem day care center. And 15 of the 21 children surveyed preferred the white doll over the black one, a result that has astounded many.

Clark and his wife Mamie Phipps Clark, also a psychologist, conducted the doll study in 1950 that showed how racial segregation destroyed the self-esteem of black children.

The Clarendon County, S.C., experiment involved 16 black children, ages 6 to 9. They were asked their perception of a white doll and black doll. Eleven said the black doll looked "bad," nine said the white doll looked "nice."

The test results influenced the U. S. Supreme Court to hold school segregation to be unconstitutional in the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kans. case. Arguing against the separate-but-equal doctrine in 1952, Thurgood Marshall, then an attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, cited Clark's work as proof of the doctrine's damage to the self-image of black children. On May 17, 1954, Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren announced the court's decision to desegregate schools in Brown v. Board of Education. Clark's doll test was one of his citations as proof of the psychological damage on black children.

The Davis test shows that psychology has not changed very much at all.

"I'm really not shocked, I am sad to say," says Julia Hare, a San Francisco psychologist. "If you keep doing what you've always done, you're going to keep getting what you've always had. Our children are bombarded with images every day that they see on television screens and on coffee tables either the light-skinned female that everybody is pushing or they give preference to the closest to white images."

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