

Government hears AIDS testimony; responds.

by Steve Martz
Washington Blade News Service

On August 1-2, a host of gay leaders, independent medical researchers, and health and social service agency officials told a congressional panel that the federal government's response to AIDS has been too little, too late.

The panel was a House Government Operations subcommittee on intergovernmental relations and human resources, chaired by Rep. Ted Weiss (D-N.Y.). Weiss's hearing is only the second time, apart from the budget process, that Congress has considered AIDS. The first, in April 1982, was a one-day hearing conducted by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Cal.). Weiss, like Waxman a co-sponsor of the gay rights bill, shares the view of many gay leaders that federal response to AIDS has been, in his words, "haphazard and inexcusably slow."

Testifying before the subcommittee, representatives of groups and institutions, ranging from the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) to the American Public Health Association (APHA), called on the federal government to appropriate substantial funds to AIDS research, and to create a panel or commission specifically charged with coordinating the nation's war against AIDS.

"It must be acknowledged that AIDS-related efforts in all quarters of our system thus far have been ad hoc, largely expedient, and gravely incomplete," Stanley Matek, a gay past president of APHA, told the subcommittee. "These inadequacies stem ... clearly and almost completely from a lack of resources. ... The Administration's marching orders to program directors are clear: 'Don't ask for money; make us look as good as you can with what you've got!'"

Matek called on Assistant Secretary for Health Edward Brandt to convene within 45 days a meeting of nationally recognized health experts from a variety of fields to consider the AIDS epidemic. Matek proposed that the group be charged with developing a master plan for AIDS research, a budget needed to finance that research, and a list of priorities for funding.

Charges Against the Government

Matek, NGTF executive director Virginia Apuzzo, and others levelled a series of specific charges and criticism during the hearing. They said:

- That bureaucratic red tape continues to

slow vital research. "If the Jonas Salk of this epidemic were to appear today with a proposal that all of us thought worthy," said Marcus Conant, a physician at the University of California-San Francisco, "it would take him 18 months to two years to buy his first test tube."

- That the federal government routinely engages in a "double-bookkeeping" that overstates the amount being spent on AIDS research. Mathilde Krim, of New York's Sloan-Kettering Institute for Cancer Research, said the inclusion of monies for basic work on immunology gives a distorted picture of the magnitude of the government's effort against AIDS. Krim urged the appropriation of "the new money this country can always find whenever it sets itself to do a real job," and said \$100 million was the minimum needed next year.

- That the public education efforts undertaken to date by the Reagan Administration, while a laudable beginning, are inadequate.

- That the gay community had responded far more quickly to AIDS than the federal government. Apuzzo noted that the gay community will spend at least \$2.5 million on AIDS-related activities in 1983, and that another \$6.8 million has already been budgeted by gay groups for 1984. "This work is a source of tremendous pride for my community," she said. "But we cannot be expected to do the job alone."

- That the Public Health Service, while doing a good job of quelling the hysteria about possible contamination of the nation's blood supply, has not moved quickly enough to initiate research into ways of identifying contaminated blood.

- That CDC officials have been totally uncooperative in safeguarding the names of people with AIDS—although CDC director William Foege announced later in the hearing that his agency is now developing some of the privacy safeguards requested by gay leaders.

- That reporting of cases is seriously flawed by the slowness in dispatching CDC epidemiologists to major cities hit hard by AIDS.

- That statements about "throwing away money" on AIDS are based on misconceptions, such as analogies to cancer, where a cure is many years away. Conant testified, "AIDS is a baffling medical mystery. But it is a *solvable* medical mystery."

- That the government's slow response on AIDS is directly related to who is affected by

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Stanley Matek, an openly gay past president of the American Public Health Association called for the creation of an AIDS commission within 45 days.

PHOTOS: LEIGH H. MOSLEY, WBNS



Rep. Ted Weiss (D-NY) chaired the subcommittee on intergovernmental relations and human resources, which heard the AIDS testimony. Weiss is also a sponsor of the gay rights bill.

National AIDS Federation Founded; AID Atlanta covers Southeast

by Catlin Conor Ryan

One of the most important accomplishments of the second national AIDS Forum, held in conjunction with the fifth national Lesbian/Gay Health Conference (see *Front Page*, Vol. 4, No. 12) was the development of a National Federation of AIDS Related Organizations. An Interim Committee was formed in June, comprised of seven local organizations, four national organizations, and three people with AIDS.

Local organizations represented are: AIDS Project—Los Angeles; New York AIDS Network; AIDS/KS Foundation, Houston; AID Atlanta; Philadelphia AIDS Task Force; Gay/Lesbian Health Alliance of Denver and Colorado.

National organization with representation on the Interim Steering Committee are: the National Gay Health Education Foundation; American Association of Physicians for Human Rights; Women's AIDS Network; the National Gay Task Force. Gender parity (an equal representation of women and men) was

suggested for all organizational delegates, whenever possible.

Immediate tasks assigned to the Federation were to organize and fund a national AIDS lobbying project, which would be located in Washington, D.C., and to establish and fund a national resource project, temporarily located in New York City, which would serve as a national clearing house for all AIDS related information.

Fund Raising Primary

An estimated \$200,000 was budgeted annually for the lobbying project, with funds to be raised by all members of the Federation. Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York is acting Interim Treasurer for the lobbying project. Much needed funding to establish the lobbying project can be sent to: Paul Popham, 40-50 E. 10th St., NY, NY 10003, (212) 807-6655.

Funding for the lobbying project has begun with commitments of more than \$100,000. The resource/information project

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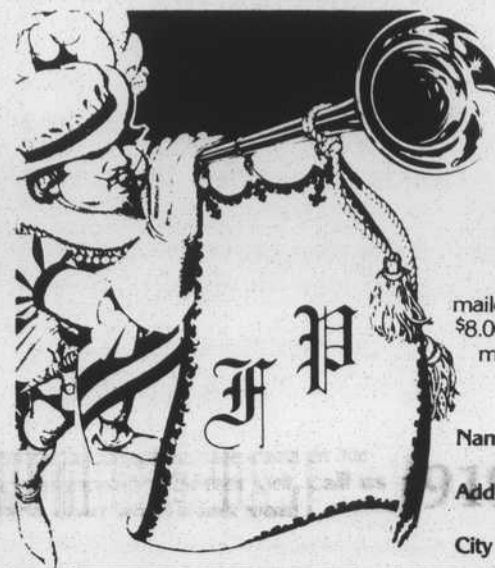
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