

Denial of counseling a dangerous notion

Accolades to Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.), whose congressional maneuvering may allow him to strip away a dangerous amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and replace it with a far more appropriate alternative.

As the bill moves to be considered by a joint committee of key House and Senate figures, Kennedy's amendment may make it possible to remove a provision that would deny federal funds to any school district that promotes or teaches acceptance of homosexuality as a lifestyle.

Under both the House and Senate versions of the bill, schools could no longer distribute instructional materials endorsing or supporting homosexuality, nor could they provide counseling to gay and lesbian students coming to terms with their sexual identity. They would even be prohibited from referring those students to other organizations for counseling, if those organizations support or endorse homosexuality.

Schools could no longer distribute instructional materials endorsing or supporting homosexuality.

Such provisions would pose a serious danger to gay teenagers, who may be desperately in need of counseling and information about their sexuality. Suicide rates are already higher among gay and lesbian teens than among their heterosexual counterparts; denying them proper help could only make matters worse.

Kennedy's alternative would instead yank funds from schools that "promote or encourage sexual activity," which would apply to both homosexual and heterosexual activity. If approved, it could render unnecessary those provisions that prohibit the promotion or support of homosexuality.

Endorsing abstinence is a much more responsible attitude for Congress to take, especially considering the myth of "safe sex," which rarely, if ever, is truly safe. Surely, it would be a better option than singling out homosexuality as something not to be discussed.

Of course, it is unrealistic to expect all teenagers to practice abstinence, so it would also be wise to describe ways to make sex "safer," both for heterosexuals and homosexuals. But always there should be emphasis placed on the fact that the only safe sex is no sex at all. In this way, it should be possible for schools to provide essential information to students without violating the rule never to "promote or encourage" sexual activity.

Either option — Kennedy's amendment or the original text — may be less than ideal, however. Public schools have dictated their own curriculum and services, district by district, for as long as there have been public schools in this country.

Although the federal government has been needed to step in from time to time (to enforce desegregation, for instance), policy decisions in a particular school district should still remain in local hands whenever possible. Schools in San Francisco may have different attitudes than those in rural Kansas, or in Washington, D.C., for that matter. The federal government should try to respect that.

But more immediately, the government needs to put in check those individuals, in Congress and elsewhere, who would seek to deny supportive counseling and honest education to students who need them.



OPINION

Presence of AIDS will ensure cure

The 10th International Conference on AIDS opens Sunday. No wonder drugs or immediate cures are likely to come from the meeting of the world's leading experts on AIDS.

The art world presents artist retrospectives of work that changed the understanding of contemporary art. Every person growing up from 1982 on lives with AIDS. Each person has their own perspective of how AIDS affects daily life.

AIDS needs to be up front and in the face of all people on this planet until there is a cure. The daily reminder of how AIDS kills people can ensure a cure for AIDS.

The San Francisco Giants and the Colorado Rockies made a strong statement to the nation by creating a human ribbon and giving their financial support to the fight against AIDS at the July 31 game. Their action, not to be taken lightly, represents how important it is to find a cure now.

AIDS ribbons are criticized because activists argue that the ribbons are only symbolic gestures. But wearing a bright ribbon on a jacket or shirt tells others AIDS is not going away.

One of the main reasons for delaying a U.S. invasion of Haiti has been a fear that U.S. troops might not be fully informed of the dangers posed by AIDS in Haiti, where there are more cases than most other countries in the Caribbean.

The July 25 edition of *Newsweek* stated when troops receive "the old scare pitch," it includes a lecture, scientific data and slides about the AIDS epidemic in Haiti.

My perspective of AIDS and awareness of the effect AIDS has on my daily life is filled with the kind of conflict suggestive of the problems in Haiti.

I learned about AIDS from television. I wanted to know what the acronym meant. In 1982, that was my big goal.

A friend from my parents' church died in 1986 from cancer. When Randy Shilts book *And The Band Played On* came out in 1987 and he discussed how many "cancer" deaths were



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really cover-ups for AIDS, I saw Rich's death in a different way. Shilts discussed the stigma associated with AIDS. He said that many early reported AIDS deaths listed cancer as the cause. Rich was loved by the people at the church; so was his lover. He came out to the people of my parents' church during his illness. His death was sudden and he was young — 45.

The denial and shame associated with AIDS still plays itself out in obituary notices today. But I'm 27, why am I reading obit notices? Since Rich's death I've learned of more and more friends who have died.

I've been a volunteer with presenting the Names Quilt. I have worked with lesbian and gay organizations to do something, sometimes anything, to keep the love alive of those who have died from AIDS.

Paul Monette wrote an article for the *L.A. Times* on the commemoration of the Stonewall Riots. He talked with a friend who said: "They don't understand. I don't just want a cure. I want a cure and all my friends back." People who died from AIDS, died too young. Most had their entire lives ahead of them.

Fear is a natural reaction to AIDS. Fear of AIDS has many faces — prejudice, ignorance and fear of dying in general.

It is this ignorance that keeps people from acting responsibly and from practicing safe health habits.

In the March issue of *Mortality Statistics*, the Centers for Disease Control reported that the number of gay men in San Francisco testing positive for AIDS is on the rise again.

The reasons given for why people are returning to unsafe sex practices is that living alone, without friends, and seeing new

friends die before solid friendships develop, can be hard. People are frustrated. Education slowed down new AIDS cases but it hasn't stopped them because AIDS isn't taken seriously.

AIDS needs the attention given to something tearing apart the fabric of life. The back rent hasn't been paid. While awareness of the crisis grows everyday, AIDS still isn't taken seriously until a close friend or loved one dies.

AIDS' legacy is not to forget the loved ones who have died from this epidemic. Don't forget who they are, who we were to them. They can't come back but we have to be here for them. We have to live responsibly. Reckless behavior that leads to a positive AIDS test, even when people feel defeated from the loss of friends and family members, isn't going to bring them back. No one knows what happens after death. To act in a manner that could have dire consequences isn't the way to be reunited with a loved one who has died.

I still know of people who aren't thinking about what they're doing. They're not thinking AIDS affects them because, until it does, it hasn't and it won't. To some degree, we are all affected by AIDS. We may not be sick with HIV but AIDS is ours. We own it. We can't ignore and push it aside as if something more important deserves attention.

AIDS is a modern holocaust. AIDS enters into every aspect of life, even those aspects appearing to have nothing to do with it. It is now common place to give AIDS tests to newborns.

The idea that when someone sleeps with their latest boyfriend or girlfriend they're sleeping with all the people that person has ever been with is as relevant today as it was a few years ago. Communication between couple can keep AIDS from spreading.

AIDS destroys the body's natural immune system. And until a cure exists, the natural flow of life is broken.

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