

# national news

## NAPWA summit sets AIDS strategy for '96

Activists have hammered out an AIDS contract with America. It's called the 1996 AIDS Emergency Plan and will focus on voter education, registration and mobilization. It sets the ambitious goal of turning out a million people to vote on AIDS issues on Nov. 5, 1996.

The National Association of People with AIDS called a two-day strategic "leadership and mobilization summit" over the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend. The group will continue to coordinate coalition activities.

Executive director Bill Freeman said the 50 attendees, gathered on only a month's notice, had "reached consensus on 17 strategic issues across five issue areas." Those positions were crafted into final language at the end of January, and circulated to other organizations for their support.

"We are not afraid of putting our contract against their contract and saying, 'These are the values we hold,'" said NAPWA's Cornelius Baker. "In 40 days we will see who has responded."

"It's not rocket science," Freeman commented. He quoted the final 1993 report of the National Commission on AIDS: "What needs

to be done is not complicated. It requires leadership, a plan, and the national resolve to implement it."

Jane Silver is a public policy analyst with the American Foundation for AIDS Research and heads up the working group on treatment issues in the coalition.

"There needs to be a commitment and a demand for a cure," she said. "That means a battle plan. It needs to be public and private. It means that someone is in charge and accountable. And it means the dollars to fulfill that battle plan and build the infrastructure and access to delivery for a cure."

The prevention and testing working group is chaired by Rob McMurrugh of the Florida HIV Planning Group. Its priorities are enhanced counseling and testing, and "confidentiality so that testing stays anonymous."

Prevention efforts should be culturally sensitive and funding should not be block-granted to the states. McMurrugh said the goal is audacious: "by the year 2000 [to] get the new infection rate to zero, or as close as humanly possible."

The three priorities in services include maintaining Medicaid as an entitlement program with adequate levels of funding, and if managed care cannot be avoided then ensure that strict procedures make it work for people with AIDS.

Ryan White must be reauthorized and funded for the remainder of the fiscal year. Housing assistance must be maintained at current levels in future years, reported John Voyles with the Sonoma County (California) AIDS Foundation.

Eileen Hansen, of the Women's AIDS Network in San Francisco, said the group "oppose[d] congressional or other attempts to mandate public testing of pregnant women or newborns...or to impose treatment." It also strongly challenged "religious stigmatization of people with HIV and AIDS...and efforts of the religious right and the pope [to do so]...specifically in education and prevention efforts."

Anne Donnelly, policy analyst with Project Inform, characterized the meeting as "crucial." She noted that the AIDS community has "tried

and failed [at this type of effort] in the past but that doesn't mean it isn't important to try again."

Wayne Turner, of ACT UP Washington, reminded the group that the gay and lesbian community emerged as a national voting block in the 1992 election. He predicted that the AIDS constituency would emerge in a similar light during the 1996 campaign cycle.

Freeman "holds out that this country can bring an end to the epidemic in four years. We could have a cure."

He quoted a letter that Abigail Adams wrote to Thomas Jefferson in 1789: "Great necessities call forth great leaders."

Bob Roehr

## Skating on thin ice

Figure skating glided back into the national consciousness Jan. 18-20 with the U.S. Figure Skating Association national championships in San Jose. The championships were partnered by the specter of AIDS, which has devastated the world of skaters, coaches, judges and choreographers.

"The world of male singles figure skating is populated—if not dominated—by gay men, a half-secret that the sport's sponsors have yet to accept, and which carries the potential to make anyone involved with the sport uncomfortable," reports a new book.

The revelations came in *Inside Edge: A Revealing Journey into the Secret World of Figure Skating*, written by *Washington Post* sports reporter Christine Brennan. The book was excerpted in the Jan. 7 issue of that newspaper.

Perhaps the best known of skaters lost to AIDS is John Curry, the British 1976 Olympic gold medalist who died in 1994. That same year a benefit in New York's Madison Square Garden memorialized more than 100 people in the field who had been lost to the disease.



"When they [gay male skaters] talk to me of their sexual exploits, they never talk about practicing safe sex," says Brian Wright, a former skater and choreographer who has AIDS and works with the USFSA on prevention programs.

The USFSA has begun education programs at its camps and competitions. But that does not guarantee participation. Brennan's book cites a program at the 1993 national competitions where none of the 300 skaters attended the voluntary prevention seminar.

Troy Petenbrink, spokesman for the National Association of People with AIDS, says it's an issue of denial.

"Athletes have this perception of being healthy, and certain things don't affect them. It's a feeling of invincibility common to many young people."

Bob Roehr

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