

NATIONAL news

low to Blue," a panel at the National Constitution Center highlighting the role of grassroots organizations in the queer civil rights movement.

For more information visit www.equalityforum.com.

—SD

HRC CALLED "MIDDLE-CLASS SELL-OUTS" BY QUEERFIST, "TURNED TO SHIT" BY LARRY KRAMER

About 900 people gathered Feb. 5 at the Waldorf-Astoria in Manhattan for the Human Rights Campaign's fourth annual Greater New York Dinner.

The \$350-a-plate fund-raiser for the nation's largest gay rights organization was filled with elected officials and celebrities. The well-heeled

about the requested funding of crucial HIV/AIDS programs. With the exception of modest increases for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program and the National Institutes for Health, most other programs that affect people living with HIV/AIDS were flat-funded or saw budget cuts.

"This budget does not reflect the concern President Bush showed during his State of the Union for HIV and AIDS care and prevention," said David M. Smith, the Human Rights Campaign's vice president of policy. "Unfortunately, the president's actions do not match his words."

The Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act, which addresses the unmet health needs of people living with



Members of QueerFist heckle HRC benefactors outside the Waldorf-Astoria in New York

guests were confronted by protesters at the entrance to the hotel.

More than 40 people from the group QueerFist were joined by pioneering AIDS activist Larry Kramer. QueerFist was formed shortly after last summer's Republican National Convention. The protesters complained about HRC's decision to honor pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, and what they perceive as HRC's mainstreamed politics.

In a statement, QueerFist wrote: "While many members of the queer community are concerned with finding basic health care services, the Human Rights Campaign is more concerned that the members of the gay middle class have the 'right' to exchange state-sanctioned vows. Blinded by the right, the HRC has failed to consistently represent the needs of the queer community, as made obvious by the Tri-State Federal Club's Corporate Equality Award, to be presented to none other than Pfizer Pharmaceuticals at their gala. In December 2004, the group announced its willingness to support President Bush's Social Security privatization in exchange for benefits for same-sex couples."

Pfizer received a 100 percent rating on the organization's Corporate Equality Index, with its Corporate Equality Award for "excellence in GLBT workplace issues." Upon receiving the award, vice president Pat Kelly said his company "tries to create an environment where all are welcome. We don't do this because we want to win awards. We do it because it is the right thing to do."

Kramer described HRC's decision to honor Pfizer as "appalling."

"The organization has turned into shit," he said. "It is useless for us now when we need them so desperately."

—SD

BUSH'S BUDGET DOES NOT SQUARE WITH RHETORIC

As President Bush introduced his 2006 budget Feb. 7, activists expressed grave concern

HIV/AIDS, was highlighted in Bush's State of the Union Address earlier this month. Yet the budget request for the program included only a modest \$10 million increase, all of which is earmarked for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program. All other programs covered by the Ryan White CARE Act were flat-funded.

In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention saw a \$4 million cut to its budget for HIV/AIDS prevention and surveillance. At the same time, unproven nonscience-based abstinence-only programs, which do not include education about how HIV/AIDS is transmitted, received \$38 million in additional funding. A recent study at Texas A&M University showed that teen-agers taking abstinence-only sex education programs endorsed by Bush became increasingly sexually active, which is the exact opposite effect that the program is designed to have.

"Programs which focus on abstinence as the sole means of preventing HIV/AIDS put our young people at tremendous risk," said Smith. "The president has repeatedly stated his commitment to combating the spread of HIV. We have to question that commitment when his ideology consistently outweighs sound scientific facts."

Despite Bush's recognition that HIV/AIDS is a growing problem in communities of color, the Minority AIDS initiative was flat-funded.

Also, \$14 million was cut from the Housing for Persons Living with AIDS program. Having stable living conditions increases the chances of strict adherence to drug regimens, which is necessary for fighting HIV/AIDS and prevents the development of medication-resistant strains of the virus.

Bush's budget also includes Medicaid cuts of at least \$45 billion during the next 10 years. These cuts would greatly affect a program that is responsible for providing health care to 55 percent of all adults living with AIDS and 90 percent of all children.

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