

national

AIDS Activists March in Washington

Portland caravan among those present

by Bob Roehr

The Campaign to End AIDS culminated its fall offensive with four days of education and lobbying from Nov. 5 to 8 in Washington, D.C., while affinity groups carried out their own set of demonstrations and arrests.

Nine caravans had spent weeks winding their way from the corners of the nation, through every state and major media market, to energize the grass roots of AIDS advocacy and tell their stories to the American public of the need for increased domestic funding to address the rising caseload.

They took to the streets Nov. 7 behind a giant puppet of President Bush, whose strings on AIDS policy,



Members of the Campaign to End AIDS protest in front of the White House.

they allege, are being pulled by fundamentalist right-wing organizations. The groups have pushed abstinence-only HIV prevention programs and have undercut the use of condoms in federally funded programs both here and abroad.

A small group of activists chained themselves to statues of the American nuclear family in the lobby of the Family Research Council soon after the office opened in the morning.

But the main event came at noon as several hundred protesters rallied outside the building on K Street that houses Concerned Women for America. They chanted, "AIDS prevention worldwide, anything less is genocide."

The marchers proceeded on to 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. One organizer said, "Make no mistake, inside this building behind us, people are taking lives every day" through policies that denigrate the effectiveness of condoms and their failure to fund prevention activities that work.

"Much of the reason for this administration's failure to do better is buried deep in the bowels of a relationship with right-wing pressure groups," said Mark McLaurin, director of federal affairs for the New York AIDS Coalition. "It is an unhealthy codependent relationship with organizations like Concerned Women for America, the Traditional Values Coalition and the lat-

est pseudo-intellectual babble spewed forth from the Heritage Foundation that has left this president inexcusably AWOL from the fight against HIV/AIDS in this country.

"Today we serve notice that enough is enough. Today we make clear that we will no longer sit silently and allow ideology to trump public health principles. Today we declare that we will counter the right wing's campaign to increase AIDS with one of our own."

"When the only growth industry in this administration's budget is demonstrably ineffective right-wing infrastructure development schemes masquerading as abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, that's outrageous," McLaurin declared. "When this administration allows these same groups' hypocritical morality to dictate that it not fund the one prevention intervention that indisputably works—needle exchange—that, my friends, is an obscenity."

Chanting "Two, four, six, eight, AIDS prevention cannot wait" and "Youth need the truth, condoms save lives," members of the group then crossed Pennsylvania Avenue and created a "cemetery" by laying down on the sidewalk in front of the White House. Dozens were arrested.

BOB ROEHR is a free-lance reporter based in Washington, D.C.



The Portland crew of the American Heritage Caravan prepares for departure Oct. 21.

The Epilogue

by Vaughn Frick

The last day of action for C2EA was yesterday, starting with an early photo opportunity in front of the Capitol dome so central and imposing both on the hill and in the land. Machine-gun-bearing Praetorian guards suited in black body armor were stationed about the grounds and recesses of the Capitol dome. There was a constant construction din of jackhammer on concrete as rows of Homeland Security blast walls were erected as visible barriers of the "war on terror."

About 75 to 100 C2EA caravaners and their supporters showed, and we held up the state flags of the United States and its territories; the flags from states where no one traveled from were held by stand-ins.

Several congressional supporters gave rousing speeches, as this was the day we were to speak with our elected members of the House and Senate about the platform and concerns of the Campaign to End AIDS.

For further entries in the CAMPAIGN TO END AIDS blog, visit c2ea.blogspot.com.

VAUGHN FRICK was an American Heritage Caravan rider from the Portland area.

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