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# OPINION



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## HIV's Hold in Communities of Color

We must all do our part to stop this disease

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Over 30 years ago, America, and nations around the world, came face to face with HIV/AIDS—a devastating global, public health concern that decimated cities, communities and countries alike. In the three decades since its discovery, much has changed—and thankfully—much has improved.

Today, advancements in prevention and treatment have led to a significant reduction in HIV transmission; the expansion of HIV screening and testing has resulted in far more people knowing their HIV status and getting help early; and new and better drugs are allowing those infected with HIV/AIDS to lead longer and better quality lives. That's the good news.

But the news that should give us pause is that while we stand undisputedly victorious on a variety of battlefronts against this devastating epidemic, we are losing a costly war—one that primarily

claims young, male and female African-Americans and Latinos as its victims.

HIV/AIDS does not discriminate. Sexual orientation, race or gender cannot protect you from HIV infection, but unfortunately, in far too many cases, those factors could increase your risk of infection. An estimated 1.2 million people are living with HIV infection in the United States today. Compared to other races and ethnic groups, blacks and Hispanics are the groups most affected by HIV—accounting for a higher proportion of new HIV infections, of those living with HIV and of those ever diagnosed with AIDS.

In 2010, African Americans accounted for 44 percent of all new HIV infections. While African Americans are 12 percent of the U.S. population, in 2011, they accounted for 41 percent of people living with HIV. Hispanics represent 16 percent of the population, but in 2011 accounted for 21 percent of those living with HIV.

The numbers are graver still for African-American women. CDC statistics point to AIDS as the fourth leading cause of death among African-American women

ages 35-44. According to the latest statistics, African-American women accounted for 64 percent of new HIV infections. Hispanic women accounted for 15 percent of all new infections and white women accounted for 18 percent.

To win the war on HIV/AIDS; to achieve the three zeroes; we cannot approach the epidemic as a standalone public health crisis. Our nation must develop a multi-pronged approach to HIV/AIDS that also addresses equal access to health care and civil rights.

The lack of access to healthcare must be addressed in communities of color if we are going to effectively address the prevalence of this disease. While the Affordable Care Act has expanded the coverage of HIV prevention services and medical care, it can only work where it exists.

It comes as no surprise that in states that rejected ACA, which also tend to be poorer states, HIV/AIDS remains at crisis levels. One in every eight people diagnosed with HIV is unaware of their status. That lack of awareness, the lack of access to prevention and education are needlessly decimating communities of color.

According to the CDC, African Americans also have the

worse outcomes for continued care after diagnosis. While there can be no true statistical measure of the effect of stigma, fear and discrimination around HIV, the oftentimes real fear of rejection and stigmatization plays a large role in people choosing to not get tested or to keep their status to themselves.

We must all do our part to stop the spread of this disease. The National Urban League has joined the Act Against AIDS Leadership Alliance. The organization is one of only 20 agencies taking part in the federal government's first HIV prevention media campaign in 20 years. As a part of this total effort, more than 500 HIV related events and trainings have taken place.

The leadership of community based organizations, corporations, and local and the federal government is important, but there is work out there for every one of us. Know your status; get tested; and encourage the people you love to do the same. And when you meet someone with HIV/AIDS don't perpetuate the problem of stigma and discrimination, be a part of the solution and help us get to zero.

*Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.*



## A Green and Dirty Gift from Congress

Deal highlights mismatched energy policies

BY EMILY SCHWARTZ GRECO

As lawmakers scurried to keep the government open and head home for the holidays, they wrapped spending and tax deals into a costly measure that highlighted our nation's mismatched energy policies.

Specifically, this monster bill extended and restored tax incentives for wind and solar power while lifting a ban on crude oil exports that began during Jimmy Carter's presidency. On the one hand, the private sector can keep generating a growing share of the nation's electricity from renewable, free, and non-polluting resources. On the other hand, some oil that might have stayed in the ground just became more likely to be extracted and burned.

But the deal's contradictory compromises won't cancel each other out. Ultimately, the Republican-led Congress — which largely pledges its allegiance to Big Oil — wasted

no time in helping the United States adhere to its commitments under the global accord sealed in Paris.

As more homeowners, drivers, industries, and utilities draw their power from the sun and the wind, catastrophic climate change will become less likely. And the long-term climate benefits of boosting wind and solar power for five more years will outweigh the potential climate pollution from allowing

crude exports, Council on Foreign Relations energy expert Michael Levi predicts.

Currently, oil prices are so depressed due to a global glut that there's little demand elsewhere for U.S. crude. If oil markets bounce back, the long-term climate consequences of this largely symbolic victory for Big Oil will probably be small. Stretching renewable-energy credits out for another five years, however, will deliver major relief to the wind industry. The Production Tax Credit, its primary source of federal support, had been in limbo for most of the past two years.

Then there's the solar energy In-

vestment Tax Credit. Without the new tax deal, it would have expired at the end of 2016. Now it's assured through 2022.

Wait. Many Republican lawmakers scoff at the notion of climate action and are trying to sabotage President Barack Obama's Clean Power Plan. Why would they buttress renewable energy right after the Paris deal?

There are plenty of reasons.

Take job creation. The solar industry alone already employs 200,000 workers and anticipates bringing another 140,000 on board because of the tax credit's extension. It also goes out of its way to hire veterans and plans on hiring 50,000 of them by 2020.

"These jobs are stable, well-paying, and cannot be exported overseas," observed Solar Energy Industries Association CEO and President Rhone Resch.

There's also the shockingly good results of government support for these industries through the tax code, which in recent years has coincided with technological breakthroughs that are now slashing costs for turbines and solar panels.

Over the first three quarters of

2015, wind and solar energy constituted more than 60 percent of the nation's new energy capacity. The United States is undergoing a renewable energy boom that's leaving coal and nuclear power in the dust and overshadowing what until recently appeared to be unstoppable growth for natural gas-fired power stations. Then, there's vigorous public support for wind and solar energy, which is nearly as strong among Republicans as Democrats.

While letting solar tax credits lapse wouldn't have short-circuited that part of the renewable boom outright, Rhone's solar trade group predicted that it would have slowed things down, including the pace of job and investment growth.

Likewise, the wind industry — despite boasting about \$20 billion worth of wind farms now under construction — feared falling off an "economic cliff" had Congress failed to restore the Production Tax Credit for multiple years.

Now the forecast for renewable energy looks sunny and bright, thanks to this green and dirty gift from Congress.

*Columnist Emily Schwartz Greco is the managing editor of OtherWords.*



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