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# Opinion

## Envisioning the Beginning of the End of the AIDS Epidemic

**I**'m very proud of what we've accomplished together over the past eight years. Here and around the world, over 18 million people are receiving the treatment and care they need — millions of infections have been prevented. What once seemed like an impossible dream, the dream of an AIDS-free generation, is within our grasp. But we know that there's work to do to banish stigma, save lives and empower everyone to reach their potential... — President Barack Obama, Video Message for World AIDS Day, Dec. 1. On June 5, 1981, the Centers for Disease Control published its weekly Morbidity and Mortality Report. The report — which described five cases of previously healthy, young gay men in Los Angeles infected with a rare lung infection — would eventually become recognized as the first official report on HIV/AIDS in the United States.

Since the start of the epidemic 35 years ago, an estimated 35 million people have died from AIDS-related illnesses around the globe. In the United States alone, more than 700,000 people have died an AIDS death since the beginning of the epidemic. Thirty-five years ago, testing HIV positive was an automatic death sentence,

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but today, as a result of targeted HIV prevention efforts, rapid testing, advances in treatment and increased access to life-saving health care, what was once a death sentence is now, in many cases, a chronic disease that can be lived with and managed.

**“**The current statistics related to HIV/AIDS are a call to action to put an end to HIV with leadership and commitment that amplifies our impact in all communities ravaged by this disease

Today, more than 1.2 million people in the United States are living with HIV, according to the CDC. New infections are down from their peaks in the 80s and 90s, with the CDC estimating that new HIV diagnoses have fallen by 19 percent from 2005 to 2014. The death rate from AIDS-related illnesses has dropped by 30 percent, approaching our nation's 2020 target rate. We must keep in mind that the epidemic is far from over and that our progress has been uneven and remains riddled with all-too-familiar racial

and socioeconomic disparities.

African Americans and Latinos continue to bear the disproportionate burden of HIV infection in our nation. In 2015, African Americans, who represent 12 percent of the U.S. population, accounted for 45 percent of HIV diagnoses. While Latinos, who represent 18 percent of the U.S. population, accounted for 24 percent of HIV diagnoses. Regionally, the South is experiencing the highest infection rates, illness and deaths than any other U.S. re-

The link between health, social and economic equity and our vision of an AIDS-free generation is real and borne out by the shocking rate of HIV/AIDS in communities of color and vulnerable populations. Given the disproportionate impact of the epidemic in communities of color, effectively addressing HIV/AIDS in the United States also means addressing poverty and a lack of access to health care.

The National Urban League and its affiliates continue to partner with organizations and groups working to de-

crease and defeat HIV/AIDS in the hardest hit populations. League affiliates have joined the Act Against AIDS Leadership Alliance. As a part of AAALI, more than 500 HIV related events and trainings have taken place. As a member of PACT (Partnering and Communicating Together to Act Against AIDS), we work on achieving the goals of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) by reducing HIV infections, improving health outcomes for people living with HIV and reducing HIV related disparities.

For those of us on the front lines of the battle versus this epidemic, these numbers are a call to action to put an end to HIV with leadership and commitment that amplifies our impact in all communities ravaged by this disease. It is also a vivid reminder that health, health care, disease and its dissemination and eradication do not exist in a cultural or social vacuum.

raising the wage to \$5.85 an hour in July 2007, then \$6.55 an hour in 2008, finally increasing to \$7.25 an hour in 2009. It has been stuck there ever since. President Obama has recommended an increase of the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour, less than the \$15 an hour that many activists are advocating through the Fight for Fifteen. Puzder does not think the minimum wage should be more than \$9 an hour. He also opposes Obama Administration efforts to give overtime pay to more workers.

## Will White Workers Accept Trump's Billionaire Cabinet Picks?

**W**hen Donald Trump was running for President, he specifically targeted the “White working class,” telling them that he'd prevent their jobs from leaving the country, that he'd bring back manufacturing jobs, and that he'd revive the oil and steel industries. He hasn't taken office yet, but he has already celebrated the fact that Carrier, a furnace manufacturer in Indianapolis, Indiana, has agreed to keep jobs in the United States, even though they had earlier announced that they would have moved jobs to Mexico.

The Carrier deal that Trump has been crowing about is so deceptive, that some business writers describe it as a scam and a union leader accused Trump of lying his hind parts off. Trump says he saved over a thousand jobs, but the real number may be closer to 730. Carrier will still relocate more than 500 jobs to Mexico, and they had already planned to keep about 300 jobs in the United States. So Trump may have “saved” 400 jobs, not 800 or a thousand, and Indiana Governor Mike Pence had to give up \$7 million in tax benefits to keep the jobs here. Trump and Pence have also signaled that they are willing

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to play “let's make a deal” on a case by case basis to keep jobs in the United States, instead of using public policy to encourage the development of U.S. jobs and to limit the mobili-

**“**Mr. Trump seems to have assembled a team of war-mongering generals and bombastic billionaires

ty of capital. And, Carrier is still closing another Indiana plant, but there has been no intervention for that closure.

Now, Mr. Trump has indicated that Andrew F. Puzder is his choice for Secretary of Labor. Puzder, the CEO of CKE Restaurant Holdings, a company that franchises Hardee's and Carl's Jr. fast food outlets, has opposed minimum wage increases, worker protections, paid sick leave, and the Affordable Care Act. He has said that he welcomes automation in the restaurant industry, because machines are “always polite...never take a vacation, never show up late,

there's never a slip and fall or an age, sex, or race discrimination case.” While the Department of Labor has been the advocate for workers, Mr. Puzder seems to be an advocate for worker exploitation.

Okay, y'all working-class White folks, those of you who voted for Mr. Trump, are you ready to swallow a bitter pill? Because Mr. Trump has shown you, yet again, what he thinks of you. The historian Doris Kearns Goodwin wrote

about President Abraham Lincoln's “Team of Rivals.” What Mr. Trump seems to have assembled is a team of war-mongering generals and bombastic billionaires. The Puzder appointment, then, is consistent with Mr. Trump's philosophy, but it is inconsistent with the notion that the Labor Department should be an advocate for workers, and should regulate labor markets and enforce labor legislation.

The minimum wage was stuck at \$5.15 an hour for ten years before it was increased in 2007. Then, Congress approved a three-step increase,

raising the wage to \$5.85 an hour in July 2007, then \$6.55 an hour in 2008, finally increasing to \$7.25 an hour in 2009. It has been stuck there ever since. President Obama has recommended an increase of the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour, less than the \$15 an hour that many activists are advocating through the Fight for Fifteen. Puzder does not think the minimum wage should be more than \$9 an hour. He also opposes Obama Administration efforts to give overtime pay to more workers.

It would be crass to say that Puzder purchased his position, but it is important to note that he contributed more than \$300,000 to the Trump campaign. His nomination is consistent with that of Oklahoma attorney general Scott Pruitt, a climate change denier, to head the Environmental Protection Agency. Just as Pruitt has no intention of protecting the environment, prioritizing energy production over environmental protection, Puzder has no intention of advocating for or protecting workers.

If Mr. Trump and Mr. Puzder have their way, they'll get chump change for hourly pay. Is that the change they want to believe in?