



Leading AIDS Groups Turn Up the Heat on Presidential Candidates

Website and new report unearth surprising responses on hot-button HIV/AIDS issues

New York, NY - Three of the nation's leading AIDS organizations — Housing Works, Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), and the AIDS Foundation of Chicago — polled 16 presidential hopefuls on pressing AIDS-related issues as part of an ongoing HIV/AIDS candidate and voter education campaign. Now the results are available on AIDSVote.org.

"World AIDS Day is this Saturday [Dec. 1], but you could also say that World AIDS Day is Election Day 2008. That's because our next President will have the opportunity and the responsibility to end AIDS," said Charles King, President and CEO of Housing Works. "She or he will have the tools to treat 33 million people living with HIV—including over a million Americans—around the planet, as well as the tools to stop the spread of the virus. We're here to build the political will to make that happen."

"More than ever, the American public is calling for meaningful health care reform which includes bold leadership in the area of AIDS," said GMHC Chief Operating Officer Robert Bank. "Voters need to know what the candidates will do to fight AIDS when determining their readiness to be President."

The launch of AIDSVote.org, timed to coincide with World AIDS Day on December 1, features the results of the AIDSVote.org candidate questionnaire and *Where Do They Stand? The Gay Men's Health Crisis Report on the 2008 Presidential Candidates and HIV/AIDS Issues*, a detailed portrait of every candidate's history in public life on HIV/AIDS issues.

The AIDSVote.org website answers questions like "where does Rudy Giuliani stand on needle exchange funding?"; "will Sen. Barack Obama end federal support for ineffective and harmful abstinence-only education?"; and "will Sen. Hillary Clinton redouble efforts against global HIV/AIDS?". Voting records and public comments provide the basis for GMHC's comprehensive report and a useful "quick chart" comparing the candidates' AIDS-related public record and positions.

Some of the notable information available on AIDSVote.org and on GMHC.org:

- The GMHC report documents, for the first time in one place, the stark differences between Democratic and Republican presidential candidates on nearly every AIDS issue. For example, seven Democrats have committed to investing \$50 billion to fight HIV/AIDS globally over the next five years. No Republican candidate has made a similar commitment. All eight Democratic candidates support comprehensive sex education, whereas seven of eight Republicans have opposed it. Most of the Democrats support lifting the ban against HIV-positive foreign nationals visiting and/or immigrating to the U.S.; most Republican candidates either support the existing ban or have not come out against it.
- The three leading Democratic candidates—Sen. Barack Obama, former Sen. John Edwards, and Sen. Hillary Clinton—have all publicly supported ending the ban on federal funding for needle exchange, a scientifically proven intervention to reduce the spread of HIV without increasing drug use. President George W. Bush and former President Bill Clinton faced stiff criticism by public health experts for failing to lift the ban during their terms in office.
- For the first time, five presidential candidates—Clinton, Edwards, Obama, Rep. Dennis Kucinich, and Gov. Bill Richardson—have committed to crafting a national AIDS strategy early in their first term if elected. The creation of a comprehensive outcomes-based national AIDS strategy with explicit benchmarks and accountability mechanisms is a key plank in the AIDSVote.org platform. The U.S. requires nations applying for billions of dollars in federal funding under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to develop such plans—but the U.S. has yet to develop its own national strategy to combat the domestic HIV/AIDS crisis.

AIDSVote.org is a nonpartisan voter and candidate education campaign endorsed by dozens of leading AIDS organizations including the Campaign to End AIDS, AIDS Action Council, the National Association of People with AIDS, the Global AIDS Alliance, and HealthGAP.

While not endorsing candidates for public office, AIDSVote.org is dedicated to ensuring that presidential candidates know about the best possible strategies to make progress against HIV/AIDS in the U.S. and abroad. The website includes domestic and

global AIDS platforms, which detail how the next president of the U.S. can end AIDS in places as remote as South Africa and as close as South Carolina.

"We not only hope to better inform voters about how important HIV/AIDS policy issues and the need for a national AIDS strategy are in the election but also hope to better inform the candidates themselves," said Rebecca Haag, AIDS Action Council executive director.

"AIDSVote.org wants to make sure that whoever moves into 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in January 2009 will make ending the AIDS epidemic a top priority," said David Ernesto Munar, vice president at the AIDS Foundation of Chicago. "It's a matter of life and death."

The answers to the candidate questionnaire and GMHC's candidate report are only the first installments that will be available on AIDSVote.org, which will track the presidential candidates' positions on HIV/AIDS up until the November 2008 election.

Submitted as a press release.