

NMAC conference

2001

The Washington Times
April 26, 2001, Thursday, Final Edition
SECTION: PART A; NATION; Pg. A7

INSIDE THE BELTWAY

BYLINE: John McCaslin

CRYSTAL CITY ANYONE?

Paul Kawata, executive director of the National Minority AIDS Council, has "postponed" the Minority Executive Directors Retreat scheduled from July 15 to 18 at the Hilton Turtle Bay in Oahu, Hawaii.

"To his credit, Kawata acknowledged it would give the wrong perception to people if AIDS executives travel to Hawaii for this retreat, while 400 AIDS patients in Alabama can't get AIDS medications, among other national AIDS funding problems," AIDS activist Michael Petrelis told us yesterday.

A recent cover story in the Washington Monthly, written by Wayne Turner of the AIDS group ACT UP/DC, brought renewed attention to AIDS junkets to exotic locales. As Mr. Turner reported, AIDS executives and researchers have traveled to the U.S. Virgin Islands and the beaches of Rio de Janeiro to network with colleagues.

Mr. Kawata was not in the office yesterday, but a NMAC official confirmed that staff was informed at a morning meeting yesterday that the retreat was postponed indefinitely.

2003

Washington Times
October 7, 2003

'Bush bashing' spoils AIDS conference

By Robert Stacy McCain

An AIDS conference that received \$300,000 in federal funds featured political criticism of the Bush administration and workshop programs on thwarting federally mandated abstinence education.

The United States Conference on AIDS (USCA) in New Orleans, sponsored in

part by nine federal agencies, was marred by "Bush bashing," said one veteran AIDS activist.

"It's become politicized," said David Miller, a founding member of the New York chapter of ACT-UP. "There were a lot of things that went on there this year that were politicized. I'm not a Republican or a Democrat. I don't have any political affiliations other than the AIDS crisis."

Sponsored by the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC), the Sept. 18-21 conference at the New Orleans Hyatt Regency featured an entertainer who boasted that she had sexual relations with Vice President Dick Cheney.

To the tune of Aretha Franklin's "Natural Woman," actress-singer Jenifer Lewis sang that Mr. Cheney made her "feel like a natural woman," after alluding to the Monica Lewinsky scandal and describing sex with the vice president.

"It was extremely graphic," said Mr. Miller, who said that he and his wife, fellow activist Jeannie Gibbs - who are both infected with the AIDS virus - walked out of Miss Lewis' performance at the "closing plenary luncheon" of the conference.

"It was risqué to the point where it belonged on Bourbon Street," Mr. Miller said.

But Carole Bernard, director of communications for NMAC, said Miss Lewis' song was well-received.

"We do evaluations for all of our conference attendees, and the feedback that we have gotten is that they loved her song. People cheered and applauded," she said.

Bill Pierce, spokesman for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), a major sponsor of the conference, said: "This kind of behavior and action, it's not smart. It distracts from the focus of reducing AIDS in America."

The USCA received at least \$300,000 in funding from several HHS agencies. The U.S. Agency for International Development and the Department of Housing and Urban Development also were listed on the conference program as "government partners."

In one USCA workshop, "Abstinence-Based vs. Comprehensive Sexuality Education," Florida AIDS educator Harold Young criticized abstinence programs "and provided a blueprint to get abstinence education defunded and out of schools," according to those who attended.

At another workshop, William Smith of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States said abstinence education is politically motivated

and "harmful" to children.

"Certainly, the NMAC supports abstinence," said Ms. Bernard, the NMAC spokeswoman, "but the workshops focused on certain realities that exist today, which prompt examining other options for keeping people healthy and safe."

She said she was not aware of any "Bush bashing" at the New Orleans conference.

"I never heard of that, and that was certainly not our agenda," Ms. Bernard said.

The four-day conference attracted about 2,800 participants, according to the NMAC. NMAC, which receives \$4.7 million a year in federal funds, supported protesters who shouted down HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson last year when he addressed an international AIDS conference in Barcelona, Spain.

"What we saw ... in Barcelona was the response from the international AIDS community to [the Bush administration's] policy," Paul A. Kawata, NMAC executive director, said after booing protesters forced Mr. Thompson to cut short his remarks at the July 2002 conference.

Among the HHS agencies that helped fund the U.S. conference this year were the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Office of AIDS Research and the Health Resources Services Administration.

"Those who continue to act in this manner, they need to wise up," said Mr. Pierce, the HHS spokesman. "They hurt themselves. They're not helpful to their own cause, because the average person out there would be troubled by this. That, in turn, causes increased scrutiny that again distracts from the purpose of reducing the number of AIDS cases."

2006

2006 HIV Prevention Leadership Summit, presented by the Centers for Disease Control and the National Minority AIDS Council, opens June 4 in Dallas

It may seem like it was only this month that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) sponsored a conference on HIV/AIDS (because it was just this month!), but the next CDC sponsored AIDS conference is just 5 mere days away!

The organizer of the upcoming conference is the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC). Originally scheduled for Florida—like the CDC conference earlier this month—the NMAC conference has been moved to Dallas, Texas (good thing for conference goers as the weather forecast is for scattered showers in Florida).

As like the CDC's last conference earlier this month that attracted attention for its anti-abstinence agenda (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/08/AR2006050801445.html>), a previous CDC-sponsored NMAC conference also made headlines for its own anti-abstinence workshops (For details, go to <http://www.washingtontimes.com/national/20031006-101719-6969r.htm>).

While the upcoming CDC/NMAC conference does not have any blatant anti-abstinence programs on the agenda (available at http://www.nmac.org/conferences_trainings/hpls/3159.cfm), NMAC has been a notoriously harsh vocal critic of abstinence education and the Bush Administration.

In a press release in 2001, NMAC's executive director Paul Kawata stated "abstinence fails more often than condoms" (<http://64.233.179.104/search?q=cache:PC0pGhdZ-XsJ:www.findwealth.com/national-minority-aids-council-to-865438pr.html+kawata,+nmac,+abstinence&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=7>).

In a 2003 letter to the President Bush, NMAC stated "We call on you to halt the regressive policies of censorship and intimidation" the letter stated, as it outlined its allegations that the AIDS policy of the President "threatens to increase, not reduce HIV transmission rates, and jeopardizes the lives of thousands of men and women across the country who are at risk for HIV infection." The letter states "We continue to be troubled that sound public health information is being measured against a political standard and not by science." An interesting allegation considering the political content at NMAC's own conference that made newspaper headlines! This letter and NMAC's call to other groups to sign on to it is available at http://ga1.org/nmacactioncenter/notice-description.tcl?newsletter_id=10109 .

Here is a recent interview with NMAC's executive director regarding the obstacles he encounters when dealing with the Administration (one of those obstacles has clearly NOT been securing federal funding for his conferences):

MW: *You mentioned the administration. What types of obstacles do you encounter?*

KAWATA: This is probably politically the most difficult time I've ever had in Washington -- absolutely no question. We now meet with the radical right at many of the meetings we attend, so the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] had a kind of state-of-HIV prevention summit. And a man from Concerned Women for America said to me, "I think you're sick and demented, but I guess you think I'm sick and demented so I guess we're even." Andrea Lafferty, from the Traditional Values Coalition, said to me, "I just don't understand, Paul, why do you have to have more than one sexual partner in your lifetime?" At those moments you want to say, "Because it's fun." But then you realize you probably shouldn't say that. [*Laughs.*]

More at <http://www.metroweekly.com/feature/?ak=1872>

Additional information about the upcoming conference is available at http://www.nmac.org/conferences_trainings/hpls/2398.cfm .

Dallas Voice

May 26, 2006

http://www.dallasvoice.com/artman/publish/article_2225.php

HIV Prevention Leadership Summit to be held in Dallas

Event geared toward health professionals and AIDS policy makers, but local organizers hope service consumers will attend, too

By Tammye Nash Staff Writer

The 2006 HIV Prevention Leadership Summit, presented by the Centers for Disease Control and the National Minority AIDS Council, opens June 4 in Dallas. The event offers three full days of workshops and presentations and a performance by actress Sheryl Lee Ralph, AIDS activist and the celebrity spokeswoman for the council.

The summit was originally scheduled for Miami. But activists and AIDS service providers in North Texas were notified in December that the annual event was being moved to Dallas instead, according to Efren Garcia, who co-chairs the host committee with longtime activist Jaime Schield.

"We got very short notice," Garcia said. "Typically, you get a year to plan. We've had about six months, so we have really been scrambling. But we've done a good job."



Efren Garcia co-chairs the local host committee with longtime activist Jaime Schield.

Garcia said the summit is geared toward health professionals and AIDS policy makers, specifically those who receive grant funds from the Centers for Disease Control.

“But locally, we’ve been pushing it among people who have HIV, especially people in minority communities, so that they have the chance to get an idea of what is going on in terms of treatment and policies and how the different agencies and organizations work,” Garcia said. “There will be a lot of different very informative workshops people can attend.”

Schild said he believes the summit provides an invaluable opportunity for communication between individuals and organizations working different places and in different aspects of the battle against AIDS.

“Many of the agencies and individuals working to provide services for persons with HIV disease or to prevent the spread of the virus have limited opportunities to come together and work collaboratively,” Schild said.

It has also given organizations in North Texas the chance to highlight their efforts and accomplishments, he said.

“The conference and the role of the host committee has brought together about 100 individuals from all across the region to showcase our programs and agencies to the nation,” Schild said.

“Even the national sponsors have been complimentary on how efficient and dedicated we are. Often they have to step in and do host work themselves. In our case, we have been asking for more,” Schild added. “It has been great to see providers and consumers in Dallas, Fort Worth and Sherman come together to volunteer.”

The committee co-chairs said about 110 volunteers have worked to coordinate the event. But more volunteers are needed, and for every day an individual volunteers at the summit, he or she will be able to attend on day of the conference free of charge, Garcia said.

Garcia said the committee’s responsibilities included putting together activities that will showcase the city, such as the reception dinner on June 5 at Gilley’s nightclub.

But the committee’s key role, Garcia said, was helping put together the conference program of workshops, institutes and plenary sessions.

That involved reviewing hundreds of abstracts submitted from across the country and submit the best to officials with the Centers for Disease

Control for final approval, Garcia said.

The sessions are divided into five tracks: knowledge of serostatus; HIV prevention, care and treatment linkages; targeted, sustained and effective interventions; and strengthening capacity and infrastructures of organizations, communities, evaluation efforts, epidemiology and surveillance systems.

Making the final cut were workshops, roundtables and plenary sessions on targeting specific communities, on HIV rapid testing, the effect of crystal meth use on the HIV epidemic and prevention strategies, among other topics.

One of the highlights will be Ralph's performance of her one-woman show, "Sometimes I Cry: The Loves, Lives and Losses of Women Infected and Affected by HIV/AIDS," on the opening evening of the summit at the Hilton Anatole, host hotel for the summit.

The Jamaican-born actress and singer has been active in the fight against AIDS since 1990 when she founded The Diva Foundation and the annual AIDS fundraiser, "Divas Simply Singing."

For more information about Ralph's performance and a complete summit schedule, go online to www.nmac.org. To volunteer, contact Garcia at egarcia@gdcada.org or Schield at jlschield@tarrantcounty.com.

This article appeared in the Dallas Voice print edition, May 26, 2006.