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 NECESSITIES OF LIFE PROGRAM
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What Will it Take to End AIDS in the U.S.?

For those of us who have been fighting the AIDS epidemic for over twenty years, watching the presidential campaigns, and the vice presidential debate in particular, has been deeply disturbing. Vice President Cheney and Senator Edwards were asked a simple but compelling question about their plans to address the AIDS epidemic in the United States, particularly the disproportionate impact of HIV disease among African American women.

Vice President Cheney admitted that he wasn't aware of the scope of the problem in the U.S., and both candidates focused their answers not on the crisis here in America, but on the global epidemic. Neither candidate articulated a plan to address the challenges here at home.

This year alone, there will be 40,000 new HIV infections nationally. Nearly one million Americans are estimated to be living with the AIDS virus. It is a dreadful indictment of our national priorities that our political leaders are disinterested in the scope of the AIDS epidemic in the U.S.

We call on the presidential candidates from both parties to articulate and commit to an aggressive course of action to end the pain and suffering caused by AIDS. This need not be partisan or divisive. But it demands the courage to imagine that an end to AIDS is possible.

What will it take to end AIDS in the U.S.?

1. *Courageous and visionary political leadership that backs up words with action.* History has shown that inspiring political leadership is a necessary catalyst for mobilizing and sustaining effective action. Major breakthroughs such as the eradication of polio and landing on the moon only resulted from leadership that dared to imagine that these accomplishments were even possible.
2. *Broad access to effective HIV prevention and education strategies.* We know what causes this deadly infection, we know how it is transmitted and yet we have failed to stop it. Proven interventions, including access to clean syringes and effective prevention efforts that are relevant to communities most at risk, are readily available. What is missing is the political will to support these approaches on a sustained national scale.
3. *A national commitment to provide affordable HIV treatment and care to all people with HIV.* There are effective medical treatments to prolong the lives of people infected with HIV, but access to these life saving treatments is far from universal. These treatments, together with critical care and support services, not only sustain

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lives and reduce health care costs, but they also play an important role in helping stop the spread of HIV.

4. *Elimination of discriminatory laws that stigmatize people living with HIV.* For example, the travel and immigration bans on people with HIV, which were adopted more than 15 years ago in a climate of ignorance and fear, must be eliminated. Efforts to get at-risk populations tested and HIV-infected people into care are undermined by policies that perpetuate stigma.
5. *Aggressive expansion of efforts to develop new approaches to HIV treatment and vaccine research.* The power of the presidency should charge a task force of private and public sector leaders - driven by a Manhattan Project sense of urgency - to accelerate the search for a cure and effective vaccine.

In the remaining days of this election, voters will continue to judge President Bush and Senator Kerry on their leadership credentials for fighting the war on terror, revitalizing the economy and achieving affordable health care. But we call on the candidates for more - to voice their commitment not just to address AIDS in the U.S., but to end AIDS. We have yet to see evidence of such a commitment from either campaign. Twenty-three years into this horrific epidemic, the nation deserves better.

From the executive directors of AIDS Action Committee, AIDS Project Los Angeles, Gay Men's Health Crisis, Lifelong AIDS Alliance, San Francisco AIDS Foundation, and Whitman-Walker Clinic.

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