

OUR VIEW

Ignorance Isn't Bliss

Black America, it's time to wake up. Time to wake up and remove the blinders from our collective eyes, time to wake up and unhinge whatever reticence may be tacked on to how we deal with unwelcome adversity, time to wake up and loose ourselves from the fallacy that HIV/AIDS isn't the pandemic that it is.

Four years ago, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention launched a national awareness campaign in an effort to reduce the number of HIV infections in the African-American community.

Four years later, the message doesn't seem to have resonated. On the heels of National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness and Information Day, which took place Saturday, AIDS remains the leading cause of death among Blacks age 25 to 54, according to the CDC. In 2003, Blacks accounted for 49 percent of the new AIDS cases among U.S. adults, while comprising 51.3 percent of all new HIV diagnoses in 32 states from 2000 to 2003. This, despite the fact that African-Americans are only 13 percent of the total population in those states, according to the CDC.

Nationally, African-Americans represent 12 percent of the population, but one-third of AIDS patients. According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the estimated rate of adult/adolescent AIDS diagnoses in the United States in 2002 (per 100,000 population) was 76.4 among Blacks, 26.0 among Hispanics, 11.2 among American Indians/Alaska Natives, 7.0 among whites, and 4.9 among Asians/Pacific Islanders.

In Florida alone, Black women comprised 72 percent of the cases of women with AIDS. The message hasn't resonated here, either. According to the Clark County Health District Office of AIDS, Blacks comprise 24 percent of local AIDS cases and 26 percent of HIV infections, numbers disproportionate to the population figures (12 percent).

As such, thousands should've attended a National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness and Information Day community event at the West Las Vegas Library, where informational brochures were distributed and participants got free AIDS tests. Instead, the crowd barely topped 100. Most disheartening was poor representation from the most susceptible demographic (the 24-to-39 age bracket).

Our passivity on this issue — as Black churches, politicians, civic activists and leaders largely ignored HIV/AIDS in its early stages, the disease seeding itself within our populace via risky behaviors like intravenous drugs use and unprotected sex; in the decades hence, it's flowered into a full-blown plague, and now our leaders are finally paying attention — has created what's becoming a seemingly insurmountable deficit. HIV/AIDS is now a generational affliction, passed down from parent to child.

Even worse, AIDS, as the most stubborn of diseases often do, has adapted, becoming more resistant to the drug cocktails thousands have used to bomb the disease into remission or, at least, halt its destructive progression. There are recent reports in New York and San Diego of the possible discovery of an AIDS virus (isolated from two people in the Big Apple) that might be the source of a rare and potentially more aggressive form of HIV.

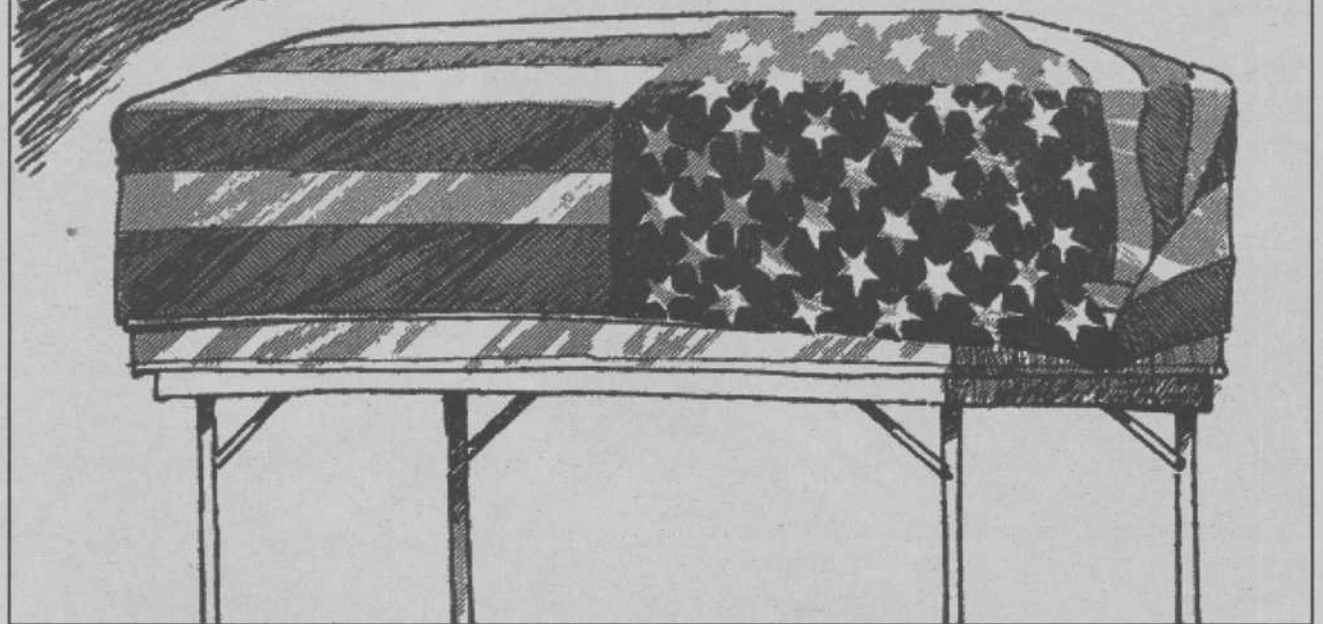
Though tests are being conducted and, in the end, the strain may not prove any more damaging, that such a supervirus could even exist is a cause for sleepless nights. It would be news for everyone, especially African-Americans, as our susceptibility to the disease is already the highest in America. Black America needs to wake up.

We are needlessly dying. Soon, a generation will be lost. Who knows after that.

Please wake up, Black America. Or else all the efforts to eradicate racism, promote respect, level the economic playing field, consolidate political power, energize philanthropy, reduce crime and break down workplace barriers might be energy wasted.

POINT OF VIEW

The ONLY TIME THE MILITARY GUARANTEES OUR TROOPS WILL BE TRANSPORTED WITH "LEVEL 3" ARMORED SIDE PANELS...



Blacks ignored in federal budget

*Dora La Grande
Special to Sentinel-Voice*

During the next couple of weeks I intend to discuss various aspects of the President's budget and the impact that the proposed cuts will have on African-Americans. This week's topic is creating the most dialogue across the nation, so I decided to approach Social Security first. I begin by stating that after conducting much research on the various proponents and the programmatic cuts associated with each, I emphasize what is apparent: President Bush's priorities are not focused on those of us here at home.

He has focused this budget on winning the war on terror and defeating terrorists at the expense of the nation's neediest. While there are some positive aspects of the budget for the poor and low to moderate-income individuals, the cons outweigh the pros.

Bush has charged that Social Security is unfair to African-Americans because they don't live as long as Whites and cannot draw down on retirement benefits. His contention is that they would be better off financially if the nation embraced a privatized system of individual accounts that can be invested in the stock market.

While there definitely needs to be a plan of action for addressing race-based income and health disparities,



ON THE RECORD

By Dora La Grande

it is quite interesting that this discussion is being introduced by the same people who, over the last four years, have provided tax relief for the wealthiest of Americans while, apparently, laying the groundwork for dismantling the very programs that have helped Blacks mitigate the effects of centuries of deprivation.

It is true, African-Americans, especially Black men, do have a shorter life span than Whites, but it has nothing to do with the Social Security system, as we are being led to believe. The shorter life span is due to our poor health status.

In 2002, the National Center for Health Statistics reported that the overall mortality rate for Blacks was 31 percent higher than for Whites. The age-adjusted death rate of Blacks from certain diseases exceeded those rates for Whites: strokes, by 41 percent; heart disease, by 30 percent; cancer, by 25 percent; and for HIV/AIDS, alarmingly, by more than 7.5 times (750 percent).

Homicide was the leading cause of death for young Black men, which contrib-

uted to their lower life expectancy. Lack of access to affordable quality health care has exacerbated the health disparities. In 2003, 20 percent of African-Americans were without health care, compared to 11 percent of Whites.

If President Bush led the effort to change how health care is provided, these disparities could be closed. But the lack of attention paid to minority health disparities, inattention to policies that could expand affordable, quality health care for all Americans and efforts to slash Medicaid — which disproportionately serves African-Americans — continue to

help foster the negative health indicators and broaden the Black/White gap in life expectancy and the number of Social Security retirement beneficiaries.

Blacks had real median income of \$29,600 in 2003 compared to \$47,800 for Whites. The Federal Reserve Board shows that Whites had more than six times as much wealth as Blacks in 2001.

Social Security privatization advocates want us to believe that this situation is due to the regressive 6.2 percent Social Security payroll tax, which they say reduces the ability of African-Americans to build wealth and save for retirement.

It is a fact that many African-American families do suffer from a lack of personal assets that can supplement their income upon retirement. This lack of private wealth, (See La Grande, Page 13)

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