

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 23, 2003

Joseph O'Neill, M.D, M.S.
Director
Office of National AIDS Policy
The White House
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Dr. O'Neill:

Last month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced a new HIV/AIDS prevention strategy. According to the editorial note that accompanied the announcement of this new initiative: "The HIV initiative emphasizes the use of proven public health approaches to reducing the incidence and spread of disease."¹ The details of this new initiative have not yet been made public, but according to CDC staff, there will be guidelines and announcements in the near future explaining how these strategies will be implemented.

As you implement this new strategy, we urge you to take an evidence-based approach — and not be influenced by those in the Administration who may be trying to politicize science and public health policy.

A recent *New York Times* article raised concerns about the influence of politics in HIV/AIDS policy. According to the article, "scientists who study AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases say they have been warned by federal health officials that their research may come under unusual scrutiny by the Department of Health and Human Services or by members of Congress, because the topics are politically controversial."² The article quoted Dr. Alfred Sommer, the dean of the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins, as saying that a "pernicious sense of insecurity" is being created among researchers by the idea that grants may be subject to political surveillance.³

¹*Advancing HIV Prevention: New Strategies for a Changing Epidemic — United States, 2003*, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (Apr. 18, 2003).

²*Certain Words Can Trip Up AIDS Grants, Scientists Say*, *New York Times* (Apr. 18, 2003).

³*Id.*

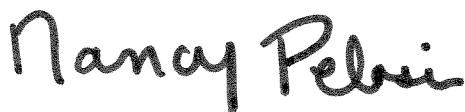
Joseph O'Neill, M.D, M.S.
May 23, 2003
Page 2

A subsequent op-ed in the *New York Times* cites e-mails being sent among AIDS researchers that say: "I would recommend avoiding all electronic communication to any N.I.H. office. . . . I am advising staff to speak 'in code' unless an N.I.H. staff member indicates you can speak freely."⁴

Clearly this atmosphere is not conducive to the kind of frank and open discussion that is critical for the scientific process to work. As the administration moves to implement its new HIV prevention strategy, we urge you to resist any effort to base policies on political ideologies instead of science. We would also like assurances that CDC and its grantees will not be hamstrung by politics, particularly with regard to programs aimed at educating hard-to-reach populations and with regard to programs aimed at educating HIV-positive people in how to reduce the risk of HIV transmission.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns.

Sincerely,



Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Government Reform

cc: Dr. Julie L. Gerberding
Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni

⁴*No Time to Get Squeamish*, New York Times (May 9, 2003).