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## AIDS in America

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# Political battles rage in major cities

by Marla Minnicino

New York, San Francisco, and Houston—the three cities where recorded cases of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome are the highest in the country—have become major battlegrounds for the fight between “gay rights” activists and citizens trying to prevent an epidemic that could kill millions. In these cities and others, politicians and health officials have been forced to address the problem because of a popular outcry which shows no sign of abating.

In the most explosive development, New York Republican mayoral candidate Diane McGrath has issued a direct challenge to the liberal political establishment—including Mayor Ed Koch—which dominates New York City. In her first major press conference of the campaign, McGrath demanded that bathhouses, bars, theaters, and pornography shops catering to homosexuals be shut down to avoid the spread of AIDS. She said she would urge the U.S. surgeon general to intervene if necessary. McGrath’s statement, reflecting mass popular ferment on the AIDS issue, demonstrated an immediate potential to affect the shape of electoral politics not only in New York City, but on the state and national level.

Impact on New York politics was immediate. Mayor Koch, fresh from an overwhelming victory in the Democratic Party primary and considered unbeatable in the mayoral election, announced forthwith that he was reconsidering his long-stated opposition to the closing of the bathhouses and had asked the city health commissioner to re-examine the issue. Gov. Mario Cuomo, widely discussed as a possible 1988 Democratic nominee for President, also announced that he was reconsidering his position.

Both Cuomo and Koch had been on record as opposing the closing of the bathhouses on the ground that they serve as “educational institutions”  
rials on AIDS and other health issues. A panel on AIDS set up by Governor Cuomo and headed by Bishop Paul Moore of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, recommended that homosexual bathhouses remain open, but implement new rules for “safe sex,” including passing out “safe” lubricants, towels, and condoms. The panel also suggested doubling AIDS research money for “education.”

McGrath declared that children with AIDS “must not be permitted” in public schools and called for people whose jobs

bring them into intimate contact with the public—doctors, dentists, nurses, restaurant workers, barbers, and beauticians—to be tested for AIDS and barred from public employment if the tests proved positive. McGrath acknowledged that the testing for antibodies of those in close contact with the public and the possible loss of livelihood for those infected with the antigen was a “harsh measure,” but maintained that “the AIDS virus has no civil rights.”

She also raised the question of the relationship between economic depression conditions and AIDS, noting that New York City could be prone to an AIDS epidemic because of deteriorating housing and unsanitary conditions in many areas. She faulted local, state, and federal authorities—including the Reagan administration—for “inadequate” funding for AIDS research.

Given the immense implications of the issues McGrath is raising, an attempt on the part of the New York liberal establishment to regain control of the situation was not far behind. In an Oct. 7 editorial entitled “AIDS and Apartheid,” the *New York Times* labeled McGrath a “bigot” for saying that AIDS victims should be isolated from the public. Then, the top echelons of the Republican Party moved to dump McGrath. On Oct. 9, a host of Republican “heavyweights,” headed by former Treasury Secretary William Simon and State Senator John Marchi, publicly endorsed Democratic Mayor Koch. Simon and Koch are not such strange bedfellows as it might appear; Koch’s “Big MAC” austerity policies led to the collapse of health and sanitation infrastructure in New York, while Simon, as treasury secretary, imposed International Monetary Fund austerity conditionalities which brought the Third World to the point of economic breakdown and contributed to the spread of AIDS and other pandemic diseases.

In another stab in the back from the GOP, McGrath’s request for funds from the Republican National Committee was denied. This was on the same day that her running mate for City Council president quit the ticket. Within two days of her controversial statements, McGrath began to receive death threats, which she feared were from AIDS victims “with nothing to lose.”

In a related battle, the question of whether or not children with AIDS can be admitted to school is the focus of popular concern in the city. A hearing on the issue in State Supreme Court in Queens, New York, conducted by Judge Harold Hyman, has become a forum for profound questioning of liberal and radical truisms. Under questioning by New York City Corporation Counsel Frederick A. O. Schwartz, Jr., City Health Commissioner David Sencer testified that quarantine of AIDS victims was impossible because it would mean the quarantine of 400,000-500,000 people, and still would not stop the spread of the disease.

But Judge Hyman disagreed: “I can’t go along with that. If you save one person from getting the disease, that would be a wonderful thing.”

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*The New York liberals say it's against civil rights and not cost-effective to quarantine AIDS victims. But Judge Harold Hyman of Queens disagrees: "I can't go along with that. If you save one person from getting the disease, that would be a wonderful thing."*

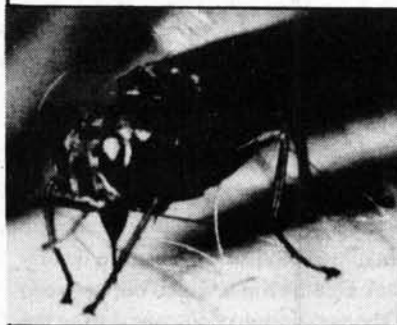
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Similar fights are breaking out throughout the country. In Houston, Health Director James Haughton—who had denounced public health measures proposed by the National Democratic Policy Committee (NDPC) and other groups as an infringement of individual rights—recently called for AIDS to be placed on the state quarantine list, along with typhoid and plague, after public outrage and panic erupted in response to the announcement by a homosexual prostitute dying of AIDS that he intended to take as many people with him as he could. Then, within 24 hours, Haughton had qualified his proposal, saying that this would be used only to place AIDS patients under orders not to spread the disease—a virtual impossibility without enforcement measures.

In San Francisco, which has a particularly active and militant homosexual community, the acting public schools chief announced on Oct. 7 that he plans to seek mandatory AIDS testing for food handlers and possibly for teachers and other school district employees. Carlos Cornejo, interim schools superintendent, said he will propose a comprehensive AIDS policy to school boards within one month. It is now rumored that Cornejo has been forced to back down. However, a large slate of NDPC-backed candidates for school board has been fielded in the San Francisco area, and two Republican California congressman, Robert Dornan and William Dannemeyer, have been leading the fight in Congress for public health measures.

Throughout the nation, action by parents and school boards is more militant. School officials in Warren County, New Jersey have filed suit to overturn the state policy of placing AIDS-infected children in public schools. A similar lawsuit is pending in Indiana, where the state has tried to force the local school district to admit a hemophiliac child with AIDS. This case could have major national repercussions. On Oct. 8, the Indiana School Board Association called on "federal, state, and local leaders [to support] a national moratorium" on the placing of AIDS victims in schools. Were this to gain momentum, both the "AIDS lobby" of "gay rights" activists and their supporters, and health officials who want to cover up the extent and danger of the disease, could be headed for real trouble.

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