

# Is the government about to act on AIDS?

by Kathleen Klenetsky

After years of dithering, the Reagan administration finally appears to be taking some positive steps to deal with the deadly challenge posed by the AIDS epidemic.

The most significant indication that a shift in the administration's approach is in the works, came from Education Secretary William Bennett, who called for limited, mandatory AIDS testing and contact tracing in a speech at Georgetown University April 30. Bennett, who is the first cabinet member to endorse mandatory testing for individuals other than military recruits, said his principal goal is to force a debate on AIDS policy, both within the administration and in the nation at large.

"We have as solemn a responsibility to protect the uninfected as we do to care for the afflicted," Bennett said, adding that the current "condom-mania" is just one indication that the United States has been "guilty of a number of . . . half-measures and evasions" on AIDS. "We need to begin to ask some hard questions and to debate some of the hard choices surrounding AIDS—questions like whether mandatory testing might be advisable under certain circumstances, whether 'contact tracing' might not be necessary and whether or not spouses or lovers have a right to be informed if their partner is found to be infected with AIDS."

Bennett endorsed making AIDS testing a requirement for hospital admissions; for patients at health clinics, particularly those servicing high-risk populations; for those seeking admissions to the United States; and for marriage-license applicants.

In addition, Bennett said that contact-tracing, i.e., requiring that public health authorities and other medical officials notify previous and current sex partners of those who test positive for AIDS, should be seriously considered, even if this meant negating patient-doctor confidentiality.

Bennett said that there are "strong arguments for considering superseding, in certain circumstances, the principle of confidentiality," in order to protect the public health. He pointed out that "confidentiality, even in the medical profession, does not outweigh all other considerations," and that the American Medical Association's Principles of Medical Ethics recognize that a physician may reveal otherwise confidential information if this is necessary to protect the welfare of another individual or the community."

While Bennett's call for mandatory testing is an important contribution to the development of a serious national

strategy toward AIDS, it falls far short of what is actually needed. What a competent program to combat AIDS would require, was presented to the the House subcommittee on labor, health and human services by National Democratic Policy Committee spokesman Warren Hamerman, who testified the same day that Bennett spoke at Georgetown. (see article, opposite page)

## The debate

Bennett's decision to go public with a policy which he has advocated privately for some time, is just one reflection of the raging debate now going in administration over what to do about the AIDS epidemic. *The New York Times* reported April 26 that President Reagan will almost certainly approve the formation of a Presidential Commission on AIDS sometime in May, and that one of the issues the commission will take up is mandatory testing. According to White House domestic policy adviser Gary Bauer, an ally of Bennett's, one of the chief motivating factors behind the decision is the "nightmarish" reports, coming out of the Centers for Disease Control and other scientific centers, predicting the emergence of new AIDS strains which will be much more easily transmissible.

Bauer supports a bill which Rep. William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.) plans to introduce in early May mandating AIDS testing for many of the same groups cited by Bennett.

At a press conference following his speech yesterday, Bennett disclosed that the White House Domestic Policy Council, to which he belongs, has been holding virtually non-stop meetings to debate a series of 40-50 options for dealing with AIDS. Indicating that no consensus has been reached yet, Bennett said that he hoped his Georgetown speech "opens the debate." The Health and Human Services department, as well as Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, are among the key centers of opposition to mandatory testing. Bennett predicted that the Domestic Policy Council would be able to arrive at an agreement and present its recommendations to the President, in a month or so.

It is still not clear in which direction the President is leaning on the issues of mandatory testing and confidentiality. Asked by *EIR* whether he had shown his speech to the President before giving it, Bennett replied that he had circulated copies to the relevant people in the White House, and that the reaction had been, "Good speech. Give it."

Unfortunately, the President and the First Lady have chosen to show their increased concern about AIDS by attending a gala AIDS fundraiser May 31, sponsored by the American Medical Foundation on AIDS Research and hosted by fag-hag Elizabeth Taylor. Run by Dr. Mathilde Krim, and underwritten by Krim's close friend, longtime Soviet agent Armand Hammer, AMFAR played an instrumental role in defeating Proposition 64, the California ballot initiative which sought to apply standard public health procedures to AIDS last November.