

AIDS and Rationality

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Remember when President Bush declared war on AIDS last spring? He announced a \$3.5 billion federal spending program on AIDS research, treatment, and education.

In case you've forgotten, that's a lot of money. Just how much? The only way I can get a handle on it is to think of a thousand dollars, remember that a million dollars is enough to let me spend a thousand a week for nineteen years without going broke, and then remember that a billion dollars is enough to spend a million a week for nineteen years without going broke.

No matter, of course. It isn't enough. AIDS activists ridiculed the proposal, calling it, as the Associated Press reports, "a small fraction of what is needed to find a cure and to treat victims."

Maybe it will cost more than that to stop AIDS. But is it rational to allocate \$3.5 billion dollars to fight a disease that is almost 100 percent self-inflicted by people intent on immoral and irrational behavior?

Not when there are more pressing matters that ought to take priority. In the nine years since the first AIDS deaths were reported in the United States, about 75,000 people have died of the disease. Meanwhile, *every year* some 296,500 people aged 15 through 64 die of heart disease; 323,475 of cancer; 40,025 of cerebro-vascular diseases; 28,650 of chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases; 15,175 of pneumonia and influenza; 19,675 of diabetes mellitus; and 31,250 of chronic liver disease and cirrhosis.

Every year! In the nine years it took for AIDS to kill 75,000 people, 2,668,500 people in the prime of life died of heart disease; 2,092,275 of cancer; 360,225 of cerebro-vascular diseases; 257,850 of chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases; 136,575 of pneumonia and influenza; 177,075 of diabetes mellitus; and 281,250 of chronic liver disease and cirrhosis. The least of these killers took almost twice as many lives as AIDS did in those nine years; the worst took almost thirty-six times as many. All together, they killed almost eighty times as many people as AIDS did.

So if we're going to spend 3.5 billion of our tax dollars on a special program to combat AIDS, how about spending \$125 billion fighting heart disease, \$98 billion fighting cancer, \$17 billion fighting cerebro-vascular diseases, \$12 billion fighting chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, \$6 billion fighting pneumonia and influenza, \$8 billion fighting diabetes, and \$13 billion fighting liver disease?

But no matter. It's all in the name of rationality and compassion. That's what the President, after calling the response "rational," said: "There is only one way to deal with an individual who is sick--with dignity, compassion, care, confidentiality and without discrimination." Dignity, compassion, and care, yes. But confidentiality? Then where's our compassion for the others who will be infected, or who have been infected and won't know it for years, because we don't require quarantining, contact tracing, and reporting, as we do with any other deadly and infectious disease?

In particular, what of the innocent victims who are infected through blood transfusions? And what of the babies being born with AIDS?

The simple fact is that militant homosexuals have a potent lobby on Capitol Hill and at the White House. They know how to get politicians' attention. Only that can explain the irrational policies that have prevailed toward AIDS--not only the hideously disproportionate expenditures but more importantly our failure to treat it like any other deadly and infectious disease. Instead we give it political and legal protection.

Remember what happened when we declared war on poverty? We got more poverty, that's what, because we fought poverty irrationally. The war on AIDS is likely to have analogous results with the present irrational policies.

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(Statistical data computed from *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1989*, pp. 80-81, Tables 119, 120.)