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Bush's war on drugs ignores AIDS, says panel

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The National AIDS Commission yesterday criticized the Bush administration's war-on-drugs plan for ignoring the AIDS epidemic.

The newly formed commission, set up to advise Congress and the president on AIDS policy, unanimously agreed that the administration's battle plan against drugs ignored the recommendations of a Reagan administration commission for fighting the twin epidemics of drug addiction and AIDS.

Among its 600 recommendations, the previous AIDS commission called last year for drug treatment "on demand" and said the government needs to fund training of 59,000 new drug treatment specialists and 2,500 new drug treatment facilities.

The interface between drug addiction and the AIDS epidemic "has been omitted from their

planning," the commission chairman, Dr. June Osborn, said. She was referring to the war plan advanced by William Bennett, the administration's drug policy director, and unveiled by Bush earlier this month.

A member of the commission, Don DesJarlais, a New York state drug treatment official, said the Bennett plan "went about a third of the way" toward what last year's presidential AIDS commission recommended.

The new 15-member commission, appointed jointly by Congress and the president, discussed inviting Bennett to testify at its next meeting in early November but made no decision.

The panel also did not call for drug treatment on demand, as several of its members on Monday predicted it would. One commissioner, Diane Ahrens, a county official from Minnesota, expressed skepticism that providing drug treatment to every addict who requested it is a realis-

tic goal, according to the commission spokesman, Thomas Brandt.

Dr. Robert Newman, president of Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City, on Monday urged the commission to come out strongly for eliminating waiting lists for drug treatment.

"It's just mind-boggling that this country continues to permit waiting lists," Newman said. "Drug treatment is not viewed as a medical treatment like diabetes or heart disease. No one says those people should wait on the street."

In other action yesterday, the commission urged Congress to "resist attempts to embark on AIDS policy initiatives offered as amendments to fiscal 1990 appropriations bills."

The commission was referring to a possible replay of attempts in earlier years by conservative legislators to require mandatory AIDS antibody testing and tracing of sexual contacts of infected people.