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—THE GAY WEEKLY OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL

NIH officials angered by scathing report from AIDS commission

by Nick Bartolomeo

National Institutes of Health officials this week slammed a recent National Commission on AIDS report that severely criticized the Institute's AIDS drug research efforts.

The officials made their comments during the seventh meeting of the AIDS Program Advisory Committee, an NIH oversight body, held earlier this week at the Institute campus in Bethesda. As part of that meeting, Committee members were slated to discuss the AIDS Commission report, entitled *Research, the Workforce and the HIV Epidemic in Rural America*, and its implications for AIDS research at NIH. But the scheduled discussion quickly turned into a tense confrontation between Committee members and Commission Chair Dr. June Osborn over the report.

The report "ended up being a very dramatic political statement, not a serious attempt to address the issues involved," Committee Chair Martin Hirsch told Osborn. "How can you justify a report that doesn't address some of the good things" accomplished by NIH?"

Released in August, the report was based on testimony presented to the Commission, a U.S. Congress-mandated body responsible for recommending federal policy on AIDS.

From these hearings, which included testimony from numerous witnesses, including representatives of NIH, the American Foundation for AIDS Research, and the AIDS protest group ACT UP, the Commission concluded that NIH was "slow" in expanding research for drugs to treat AIDS-related opportunistic infections. The Commission also decried the "lack of results" from the NIH administered AIDS Clinical Trials Group (ACTG) Program, which evaluates AIDS treatment drugs, stating that the "majority" of such drugs "have all been developed outside the program."

The report also criticized NIH for erecting "barriers contribut-

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"It's hard to believe it's come to this," said Jerrie Linder, the Center's vice president.

Eviction hastens Center's closing

by Lou Chibbaro Jr.

An eviction order forced the D.C. Gay and Lesbian Community Center to close its doors for good Wednesday, ending 11 years of service as a meeting place and drop-in facility for Gays.

The eviction, which caught the Center's two remaining tenants by surprise, came two weeks before the Center was scheduled to go out of business because of long-standing financial problems.

Officials with the Gay and Lesbian Switchboard and the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League

said they had to scramble to arrange for volunteers to help remove their possessions from the building at 1228 17th St., N.W., before the expected arrival Wednesday of U.S. Marshals. In D.C., Marshals normally carry out evictions by placing the contents of a building on the sidewalk.

"It's hard to believe it's come to this," said Jerrie Linder, the Center's vice president and longtime volunteer.

On Tuesday afternoon, while she and another

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Hill lobbyists enjoyed a flashy finish

by Lisa M. Keen

Nobody could have predicted it, but the 101st Congress was a big boom for the Gay civil rights movement. Some say it's because the movement finally arrived in Washington; some say it's because political hatemongering has, at last, become unpopular; and, some say it was one-part scramble and one-part luck. But the victories are undeniable.

News analysis

The 101st Congress passed a bill to repeal the country's long-standing policy of banning Gays from visiting the U.S. It opened the doors for the Department of

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Bob Williams carves the turkey for Black and White Men Together's Thanksgiving dinner last weekend.

Frank feeling better after heart attack

by Lisa M. Keen

Rep. Barney Frank suffered a mild heart attack last Saturday night but is now recovering nicely at a hospital in Boston.

Frank's lover, Herb Moses, said Monday that Frank fell ill shortly after completing his normal exercise workout at a Boston Gay gym Saturday night around 8:30. He took a cab to the emergency room at Beth Israel Hospital, where doctors diagnosed that he was experiencing a heart attack. After first administering a new heart attack treatment medicine, doctors performed an angioplasty on Frank. An angioplasty is a non-invasive

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Some of the Clinic's 1,600 points of light *see page 10*

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NIH officials angered by AIDS panel's scathing report

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ing to the low level of participation" in ACTG-sponsored drug trial programs, including a "lack of access to basic medical services and clinical trial information." In addition, the report stated that women and people of color were under-represented in AIDS drug trials.

It concluded that "the NIH clinical trials program is in serious trouble" and recommended that NIH increase participation of women and people of color in the trials, address the "lack of access to primary care services" that are "undermining current efforts in HIV/AIDS research," and speed up investigation of drugs to treat opportunistic infections.

"This is the nice version" of the report, Osborn told the Committee. "I don't want to apologize for it. This is the consensus opinion of the National Commission on AIDS...[and] you ought to listen real hard to what we say."

But Hirsch said he found the report's "lack of objectivity" to be "striking" and a slap in the face to the people involved in the clinical trial program.

Hirsch also criticized the Commission's timing in making its suggestions through the report, noting that many of the recommendations made "were undertaken at the time the Commission met and the report was issued."

"It's a way for the Commission to get credit for things they had nothing to do with," said Hirsch.

Anthony Fauci, executive secretary of the Committee and director of NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, was more direct in his com-

ments to Osborn.

"To make a statement that the majority of drugs were approved outside the system [gives the impression that] there is a massive amount of [AIDS-treatment] drugs out there, and ACTG missed the boat," Fauci told Osborn.

Noting that only one of the five AIDS treatment drugs developed since the inception of ACTG was evolved fully outside of the program, Fauci asked Osborn if she felt the Commission's assessment was fair.

Stating that it was not her "intention to be unfair," Osborn continued to stress the Commission's perceived shortfalls in the NIH AIDS programs, clearly laying the responsibility for the provision of basic health care for people with AIDS on the Institute's doorstep.

"The research endeavor will stop moving forward" unless health care issues are addressed, said Osborn. "People are reading the research establishment as having written off anyone who is infected now."

"People ask me, 'Aren't you using the language of ACT UP?'" said Osborn. "And I say, 'yup.' There are a lot of other people using the same language, and I won't shy away from [it]. There are a lot of voices in the business at hand, and it's terribly important that we not fight with each other."

Fauci said that he shared Osborn's concerns regarding health care delivery but that it was his understanding that NIH's mandate was in basic biomedical research.

"To solve the problems of the health



by Doug Hirsche

"This is the nice version" of the report, June Osborn told the Committee. "I don't want to apologize for it. This is the consensus opinion of the National Commission on AIDS...[and] you ought to listen real hard to what we say."

care delivery system in this country is not what NIH was set up to do," said Fauci later in the meeting. "Is it the responsibility for the nation's premier biomedical research facility to do that? The answer is no."

Fauci also strongly disputed Commission criticism of "low participation" in AIDS drug trials.

"There are 11,000 people [in] clinical

trials," said Fauci. "If you want 400,000 people [in] clinical trials, every penny at NIH must go to that." Such a move, said Fauci, would eliminate "every basic medical research" program at the Institute.

In response to the Commission's report, the Committee drafted a letter to Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan expressing concern about the provision of basic medical care for persons with AIDS. The document had not been approved by all Committee members by *Blade* press deadline, and, according to Committee member Dr. Wendy Mariner, could therefore not be released.

Fauci stated that the Institute's AIDS budget—approximately \$808 million for fiscal year 1991—is not rising as fast as in recent years and would probably remain at 10 percent of the overall NIH budget for the foreseeable future. Such "plateauing" of the budget, he said, would lead to a "serious prioritization" of AIDS research funding. But Fauci did not provide details about the prioritization process.

In other news during the two-day meeting, researchers at NIH and several universities presented study results that underscored previous reports that people with AIDS may experience deficiencies of zinc, vitamin B6, and vitamin B12 that could affect the progression of HIV-related illness. The group stopped short of recommending that doctors supplement the diets of people with AIDS with these substances, stating that more research needed to be done. ▽

Rep. Barney Frank feeling better after mild heart attack

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procedure in which a catheter is used to funnel a tiny balloon into a clogged artery. Once the balloon is in place, it is inflated to stretch open the clogged blood vessel.

Frank was then admitted to the hospital's intensive care unit; he was moved to a regular room on Tuesday and listed in stable condition.

"He's in pretty good spirits," said Moses. "He's awake and sufficiently grouchy that I know he's feeling pretty good."

Moses said Frank's physician, Dr. William Grossman, chief of cardiology, expects the 50-year-old member of Congress to experience a normal, gradual recovery and be ready for work when the 102nd Congress convenes in January.

Frank, who won re-election to a sixth-term with relative ease this month, was back in Boston last weekend to attend a number of political events, including the annual Gay and Lesbian Elected Officials Conference. Moses said Frank exercises regularly and had completed a routine workout when he began to feel

chest pains.

A statement released by Beth Israel Hospital this week said that emergency room tests Saturday night showed blockage in an artery and that doctors first administered TPA (tissue plasminogen activator), an enzyme that dissolves blood clots.

"This treatment was initially successful but within three hours," noted the statement, "the pain recurred" and Grossman performed the angioplasty.

Grossman was also quoted as saying that Frank "had been in excellent health

prior to this incident."

A statement issued by Frank's Capitol Hill office quotes Frank as saying that "there's no good time for something like this to happen, but at least Congress is now out" of session.

Frank was due to return to Washington on Tuesday to take part in a press conference with several other members of Congress. The press conference was to announce the members' lawsuit to prevent President Bush from taking "offensive military action" in the Persian Gulf before consulting with Congress. ▽

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