

July 29, 1992

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: All Commissioners

FROM: Harlon Dalton

RE: Background Information on Communities of Color Report

In reflecting on our recent discussion of the Executive Director's practice of using consultants to supplant our paid staff, it occurred to me to share with you a memorandum I sent Roy seven months ago. It reflects my concern not only over the overuse of consultants, but also my experience of being ignored, marginalized, and treated with less than the respect that I think we are all due. Looking back, I realize that my interactions with Roy around the Communities of Color report contributed greatly to my emotional withdrawal from the work of the Commission over the past several months.

When I faxed the enclosed to Roy last December, I did not "copy" June or anyone else, since I thought it was fair to give Roy an opportunity to redeem himself. He has not, in my view, done so.

As for the report itself, I remain very much committed to producing something of quality that resonates with the communities to whom, about whom, and for whom we speak. I am not interested in producing something that could as easily have come from the Institute of Medicine. I cringed when Roy revealed at our last meeting that he intended to engage yet another consul-

2

tant/editor for the report. We don't need another layer, another person known to and accountable solely to the Executive Director, another mystery person who has no idea (save through Roy) of how the Commissioners envision the report.

Roy's stated justification for keeping Karen Porter on staff was so that she could work on this report. So why do we continue to toss money around? Karen, working with Eunice, Vince, myself, and any other interested Commissioners can finish this report by September. If we need expert outside help, I am sure that one or more of the consultants who have already participated in the process would be willing to lend a helping hand, gratis. If editing help is needed, we should rely upon current or recently terminated Commission staff. We ought not be a hiring hall for consultants with whom the Executive Director has worked in the past. I especially resent the Communities of Color report being used in this fashion, particularly when the result is a loss of focus, a dissipation of energies, and a disempowering of the Commissioners and staff who are most deeply committed to the issues the report should highlight.

December 27, 1991

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Roy Widdus

FROM: Harlon L. Dalton

RE: Forthcoming Commission Report on Communities of Color

In a conversation earlier this morning, I asked Karen Porter to convey to you my pique regarding the ever-shifting process for producing the Communities of Color report, my sense that things have gotten quite out of hand, and my annoyance (to put it mildly) that I keep hearing about your proposed changes third-hand or by serendipity, after they already have been set in motion. I asked her to inform you that I do not wish to be associated with the report in any way until and unless you and I come to some mutual understanding regarding both the substance of the report and the process by which it is to come into being.

Upon reflection, I realize how unfair it is to put Karen in that position. Indeed, since one of my concerns is that you have used her (and others) to carry your water, I ought not compound the error. Hence, I am writing to you directly.

To come straight to the point, given my past involvement in the issue of AIDS in communities of color, and more importantly my role in pushing the Commission to hold hearings dedicated to the issue, I should think that as a matter of common courtesy you would involve me in planning the report. At a minimum, I should think you would find it politic to inform me of significant decisions that you have made. Were this a report on public health issues or on the role of community-based organizations, I cannot imagine that you would treat Charlie or Larry as cavalierly as I have been treated. Moreover, this is not merely an area in which I have expressed interest, invested time, and pressed for action. I agreed some time ago to be actively involved in framing and drafting the report. Indeed, my initial understanding was that June and I, between us, would write the report, and that we would utilize three consultants as a sounding board. Somewhere along the line, you and/or Jeff seem to have decided that the process should be radically altered. Perhaps, but I do not believe that it is your decision to make alone, and it is certainly not yours to make without at least the appearance of consulting me. Again, I cannot imagine that you would have related to any other Commissioner in this way.

Let me give you just one example of what I mean by a radically altered process. As I mentioned earlier, my initial understanding was that a small number of consultants would be

12/27/91 cont.

2

utilized as sounding boards when June and I reached a point that we thought such help was appropriate. I subsequently heard, nhand, that you were planning to use consultants to write portions of the report. I then heard that you were planning to engage a new set of consultants, different from and in addition to the ones engaged by June. I gather the plan is to use one set of consultants to write and another set to reflect. This strikes me as needlessly cumbersome, inefficient, and virtually guaranteed to raise expectations beyond our (or anyone's) capacity to deliver. Moreover, I don't understand how this two-layered consultant arrangement is to mesh with the third layer of Commission staff, several of whom have also, I gather, been asked to work on sections of the report.

Finally, I don't understand how Dawn Smith fits into all of this. When I walked into the hearing room for our December meeting, a smiling young woman walked up to me, stuck out her hand, and said: "Hi, I'm Dawn Smith. It's nice to finally meet you." Fortunately, I was able to dredge up from the recesses of my overloaded brain who she was -- a voice at the other end of a telephone regarding a conference that never came off. Since I associated her with the University of Michigan, I quite naturally asked her what brought her to Washington. "I've been hired by Roy to write the Communities of Color report," she replied. "That's news to me," I exclaimed, once I was able to lift my jaw off the ground.

Roy, this is simply no way to conduct business. It is unprofessional and demeaning. I'm sorry to be so blunt, but my irritation has been building over several months. I have spoken to Jeff about this, but to no apparent avail. I held my tongue at the December meeting as you presented a fantasyland account of the report's progress because I thought it inappropriate to raise my concerns before the full Commission without first airing them with you. I guess I hoped you would iron things out. Instead, the confusion and indirection simply multiplies. The last straw was when I received a telephone call asking me to come to Washington the week before Christmas to "meet with the consultants." About what? Who are they? What have they been told about the report? What do they understand to be their role? Why should we meet now, rather than further along in the process? These and a million other questions came to mind. I am sorry, but I can't be part of something I don't even understand! Nor do I much appreciate being treated as an afterthought.

I will be mostly unreachable until the 1st of January. Thereafter, I would appreciate hearing from you.