President's Year of Action (and Executive Orders)

An upbeat President Obama proclaimed this to be “a year of action” in his 2014 State of the Union (SOTU) Address. The President focused much of his speech on domestic issues, including education, job creation and training, raising the minimum wage, equal pay for women, voting rights, and health. The President said he is committed to making Washington work better, as well as to restoring the trust of Americans to their elected leaders, and pledged to take action using the powers of the Presidency, including executive orders, when Congress fails to act.

In discussing the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the President provided stories in support of the law, noting that three million young people have gained coverage under their parent’s plan as a result of the Affordable Care Act. Additionally, nine million Americans now have health insurance since signing up under Medicaid or individual plans since October 2013. In a particularly interesting moment he addressed his Republican critics directly by criticizing the more than 40 votes to repeal the law and to call for specific plans and changes that they thought would control costs and provide coverage better than the ACA.

The President further pointed to Governor Steve Beshear (D-KY), in the audience as a guest of the First Lady, for his success in helping people in Kentucky, a conservative state, to gain coverage under the health care law. In one of the more amusing moments of the evening, President Obama called for all uninsured citizens to sign up for health care coverage for 2014 by the deadline for open enrollment of March 31, saying “Moms, get on your kids to sign up. Kids, call your mom and walk her through the application. It'll give her some peace of mind, and plus, she'll appreciate hearing from you.”

In the Republican party's official response, Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) only briefly touched on healthcare saying, “Republicans believe health care choices should be yours, not the government's.” She said that she had received a letter from a constituent whose insurance rates had gone up by $700 under the President's plan and called for greater affordability of health care. However, she did not provide details about how best to lower premium costs.

Farm Bill Nears Completion
The long delayed and controversial farm bill is nearing final congressional action. House and Senate Agriculture Committees chairs Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK) and Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) released the conference report, the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Report 113-333; H.R. 2642), on Monday. The compromise bill provides five-year reauthorization (FY 2014 –FY 2018) for farm and nutrition assistance programs. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates the cost of the bill to be $956.4 billion over 10 years, through FY 2023. The CBO projects budget deficit savings of $16.6 billion over the 10-year period. Congressional offices peg the deficit savings to be $23 billion. The difference is whether the enacted sequestration cuts that total $6.4 billion for the bill’s programs are or are not factored in the savings estimate.

The House of Representatives passed the conference report on Wednesday on a 251-166 vote. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) filed cloture on the conference report on Thursday, setting the stage for Senate action starting on Monday. Passage in the Senate is expected and the President likely will sign the report into law.

Among the conference report’s programs is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps, accounting for $756 billion over 10 years. The bill calls for cutting SNAP spending by $8.6 billion over 10 years. The cuts come from stopping a practice used by 16 states and Washington, D.C., that effectively increased the amount of SNAP benefits for some people. The estimated effect will be to cut SNAP benefits by an average of $90 a month for 850,000 households. The $8.6 billion cut is viewed by most commentators as a compromise between the draconian $39 billion cut in nutrition assistance legislation that the House passed and the $4 billion cut in SNAP spending that was included in the Senate’s version.

The still sizable SNAP spending cut was prominent among the reasons 103 House Democrats voted against the conference bill. Among the Democrats who voted “No” were the co-chairs of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Rep. Raul Grijalva (AZ) and Rep. Keith Ellison (MN). Sixty-three Republicans also voted against the bill, many because they felt that the bill did not cut government spending enough.

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), a leading anti-hunger advocacy organization, issued a statement before the House vote calling for Congress Members to vote “No” on the bill. FRAC cited the “pain” that the SNAP cuts will cause for “the most vulnerable members of our society.” In an editorial on Thursday, The Washington Post called for the President to veto the bill if it reaches his desk. Expressing a different perspective, Robert Greenstein of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, issued a commentary that describes the bill as a reasonable compromise and notes that its rejection could lead to Congress enacting SNAP cuts more in line with those proposed by the House, which would be harmful to many more SNAP beneficiaries.

SNAP is the largest federal nutrition assistance program, benefiting nearly 48 million people in FY 2013. The primary goals of SNAP are food security and access to a healthy diet. The program is a critical component of the safety net for low-income people and their families. The average monthly benefit in FY 2013 was about $133 a month per SNAP recipient.

The reality that the farm bill conference report will likely be passed by the Senate and signed into law by the President must not lessen advocates’ focus on SNAP. If enacted, the bill will include the 4th cut to SNAP in 4 years. It also continues the unconscionable trend of enacting spending cuts to programs that serve low-income and other vulnerable populations to pay for reducing the federal deficit. We advocates should not think that the five-year reauthorization period provides protection against further cuts to
SNAP spending. Many conservative House members have expressed their commitment to deeper cuts to SNAP spending and to cruel changes to eligibility criteria that would eliminate thousands from the program in the future. AIDS United will continue to monitor legislation affecting SNAP and keep you informed and engaged.

For a summary of the new farm bill prepared by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, click here.

**Representative Waxman Announces Retirement**

Representative Henry Waxman (D-33-CA) announced on Thursday that he planned to retire at the end of this Congressional term. He was first elected to Congress in the “Watergate Class” of 1974 and will have served 40 years at the time of his retirement.

Representative Waxman was among the first legislators to speak out about HIV/AIDS and introduced the House of Representatives version of the bill that eventually became the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act of 1990. He is currently the Ranking Member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, which is responsible for health legislation such as the CARE Act. A chapter of Representative Waxman’s book, “The Waxman Report: How Congress Really Works,” is devoted to HIV and the creation of the Ryan White CARE Act. He has long supported additional HIV and health legislation as well, including the Affordable Care Act.

AIDS United recognizes Representative Waxman’s giant accomplishments in working toward the eventual end of the HIV epidemic. He has been one of our greatest Congressional champions who has had the historical and institutional knowledge in the House to get things done. Thank you, Representative Waxman, for a job well done. We will miss you.

Representative Waxman’s Press Release can be found here.

**Senators Unveil Republican Health Plan**

In a possible sign that Republicans have begun to accept that health care reform will continue in some form, Senators Richard Burr (R-NC), Tom Coburn (R-OK) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT) released details of a plan that they say could replace President Obama’s Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). Calling their plan the Patient Choice, Affordability, Responsibility, and Empowerment (CARE) Act, the Senators pledged to refine the plan with input from Senate colleagues and health care experts.

After finalizing the plan they intend to introduce it as legislation. The plan is politically interesting because, after more than 40 votes to simply repeal the ACA in the House of Representatives, it is the first full scale plan to address the “replace” part of the Republicans’ “repeal and replace” mantra.

The proposal would keep a few of the ACA reforms intact, most notably the provision allowing young
adults up to age 26 to maintain coverage on their parents' plan. However, it cuts back on protections against pre-existing conditions by requiring people to maintain continuous insurance. The plan would also reinstate eligibility requirements limiting federal payments to pregnant women, low income children and families. Single adults would likely lose coverage now available under the ACA.

Like the ACA, the plan would also provide small businesses and individuals tax credits to purchase insurance in the private market but only up to 300% of the federal poverty level as opposed to 400% under current law. Additionally the plan would require employees of firms that provide health insurance to pay taxes on 35% of the value of the insurance. Currently these plans are tax free.

The plan itself is unlikely to be passed and signed into law as long as President Obama remains in office since he would undoubtedly veto any plan that repeals the ACA. However, it will be interesting to see if the plan’s focus on the high costs of healthcare and proposals to cut funding gains traction during this election year. If so, it might be an indication of how a Republican candidate for president might campaign on health care issues in 2016.

Full details of the proposal can be found here.

**Immigration Reform Principles**

House of Representatives Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) released a set of immigration principles on Thursday that could set the stage for House action on immigration reform this year. The principles had been distributed and discussed at the annual retreat of House Republicans this week. The principles allow for undocumented immigrants to achieve legal status if stringent conditions are met, but rule out any “special” path to citizenship.

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (CA) issued a statement welcoming the principles while noting that the principles raise more questions than providing answers.

AIDS United will provide a more in-depth report on the prospects for immigration reform this year in future Policy Updates.

**AIDS United Grantee Wins Ruling Limiting Missouri from Imposing Restrictions on Patient Navigators**

A U.S. District court ruling late last week in a case brought by Saint Louis Effort for AIDS and other organizations will prevent the state of Missouri from imposing additional requirements or limitations on the operations of Missouri’s health exchange. In particular the law prevents the state from creating restrictions on patient navigators working to help consumers find insurance coverage. Saint Louis Effort for AIDS, the named plaintiff in the case, is also an AIDS United Access to Care grantee.

The ruling noted that “the public interest is damaged if the state is permitted to thwart federally approved Navigators, CACs (Certified Application Counselors) and Counselor Designated Organizations from performing their functions.” Although the ruling only
applies to the state of Missouri, it does create precedence that other courts can look to regarding other efforts by states to obstruct the laws. The case is likely to be appealed by the State to the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals.

The court ruling can be found here. AU’s congratulatory message to Saint Louis Effort for AIDS can be found here, as well as an additional media story here.

I Am My Brother's and Sister's Keeper. Fight HIV/AIDS!

By Gina Brown, Program Manager, AIDS United

“I Am My Brother’s and Sister’s Keeper. Fight HIV/AIDS!” This is the 2014 theme for National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day was first observed in 1999, and since then, advocates, allies and people living with HIV/AIDS in the Black community have worked hard to be “Our Brother’s and Sister’s Keeper”. We’ve organized, united, strategized, articulated and advocated for the need to be our brother’s and sister’s keeper, as we remain dedicated to fighting HIV/AIDS in the Black community.

HIV/AIDS continues to disproportionately affect Black America. Currently, three in five Black Americans know someone living with or who has died from HIV/AIDS. Although we account for less than 14% of the U.S. population, Black America represented 44% of all new HIV infections in 2010, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Men who have sex with men (MSM) remain the group most heavily affected by HIV, while young Black MSM continue to account for more than half of new infections among young MSM. The CDC reports a 21% decline in new HIV infections among women overall. However, the new data shows that Black women continue to be far more affected by HIV than women of other races/ethnicities. Of all the women living with HIV in the United States, approximately 66% are African American.

According to the Southern AIDS Strategy Initiative (SASI), in 2010, 46% of all new diagnoses of HIV infection occurred in the South. Compared to other regions, a higher percentage of diagnoses in the South were among women (23.8%) and Blacks/African Americans (57.2%). With numbers this high, it is crucial to expand Medicaid in the South, since Medicaid expansion would allow greater access to care and treatment for HIV positive individuals.

Click here to read more of Gina’s blog on National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day!

Registration for AIDSWatch 2014 is Open!

Join us for the largest annual national constituent-based advocacy event focused on HIV and AIDS in the United States! A partnership of Treatment Access Expansion Project, AIDS United and the US People Living with HIV Caucus, AIDSWatch draws hundreds of HIV-positive advocates and their allies to Washington, DC, to educate Members of Congress and their staffs about HIV/AIDS. All participants are provided with training on current science, legislative agendas, and conducting effective meetings with their elected representation. For more information, or to register, click here.

So far, 216 participants have registered for AIDSWatch 2014. We are looking forward to another successful event and hope you will join us in our advocacy efforts. Currently, we are looking for
volunteers to serve as state coordinators. As state coordinators, you would be responsible for setting up meeting with members of Congress for participants from your state. If you are interested, please email AIDSWatch@aidsunited.org or call 202.408.4848, ext. 225.

**Special Hotel Rates!**

Hotel Palomar, which is located in Dupont Circle, is offering a special rate for AIDSWatch participants: $209/night + 14.5% tax. The special rate is available for Sunday, April 27 and Monday, April 28, and must be booked by March 28, 2014. Reservations: (877) 866-3070.

**To encourage you to register, here is a story from AIDS United's Melissa Donze, a planner and participant in AIDSWatch 2013:**

Last year was very exciting! It was the first year AIDS United was so heavily involved in the planning of AIDSWatch. We scheduled meetings with over 195 offices for the two day event. Participants were so energized and enthusiastic to be a part of such a dynamic advocacy effort that allows individuals to share their stories with their federally elected officials. After the training, everyone felt they had the tools, knowledge, and know-how to be influential and let their voices be heard. It was great to see people get excited about policy. I went on a couple congressional visits with previous and new AIDSWatch participants. All of the meetings I attended were productive. The congressional staffers were very responsive to people’s individualized narratives, and in a couple meetings, the actual Members of Congress met with the AIDSWatch participants. This kind of interest by actual Members was exciting – it showed they really value the work we do! Overall, AIDSWatch is a great advocacy effort that energizes individuals to become involved in the political process and public policy. I am looking forward to another great year with AIDSWatch 2014!

**Announcements**

**AIDS United CEO/President Michael Kaplan to Speak Feb. 1 at 2014 Creating Change Conference**

AIDS United CEO/President Michael Kaplan is scheduled to speak at The National Conference on LGBT Equality “Creating Change” in Houston, TX, presented by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. He will present at the Keynote/Plenary Panel on Saturday, Feb. 1 on “Why We Can't Wait: Let's End AIDS Now.” To see a full line-up of speakers, click [here](http://salsa3.salsalabs.com/o/50464/t/0/blastContent.jsp?email_blast_KEY=1272324).

**Upcoming Awareness Days**

National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is February 7. There are four specific focal points for the day: “Get Educated, Get Tested, Get Involved, and Get Treated.”

To find out more or plan an event for all Awareness Days, [click here](http://salsa3.salsalabs.com/o/50464/t/0/blastContent.jsp?email_blast_KEY=1272324).

**ANAC Earns Accreditation with Distinction from American Nurses Credentialing Center**

The Association of Nurses in AIDS Care (ANAC) announced that it has achieved Accreditation with Distinction by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC). ANCC Accreditation distinguishes organizations that demonstrate quality and excellence in the curriculum design and delivery of continuing nursing education (CNE). Accredited organizations meet comprehensive, evidenced-based criteria to ensure CNE activities are effectively planned, implemented and evaluated.

Only organizations that demonstrate zero deficiencies achieve Accreditation with Distinction. As of
September 2012, less than 10% of all ANCC-accredited organizations achieve this honor. Nurses and nurse practitioners in HIV and HIV-related care now gain access to the highest caliber of education to meet certification or licensure requirements, which in turn contributes to improved health care outcomes.

“We are proud to be recognized by ANCC for our commitment to continuous improvement and the highest quality continuing education for nurses,” said Kimberly Carbaugh, Executive Director. “ANAC’s having earned the honor of ANCC Accreditation with Distinction gives nurses the assurance that by choosing ANAC, they will receive the best CNE available.”

**Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA) to Hold Meeting on the Ryan White Program**

The Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA) will hold a meeting to discuss the Ryan White Program on February 27 and 28 at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 200 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C., 20201.

For further information, contact Ms. Caroline Talev, Public Health Analyst at the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. Pre-registration for public attendance is advised. To pre-register contact Caroline Talev at caroline.talev@hhs.gov by close of business Wednesday, February 12, 2014. Members of the public will have the opportunity to provide comments at the meeting by registering with Ms. Talev. More detailed information about PACHA can be obtained by accessing the Council's website, www.aids.gov/pacha.

**Learn More About the ACA with HIV Health Reform's Webinars!**

HIV Health Reform's webinar series titled, "We Can Do It," is designed to help individuals better understand how the Affordable Care Act works for individuals with HIV/AIDS.

To view a schedule of planned webinars, click here.

**Families USA Affordable Care Act Resource Center Available**

Families USA provides new resources for enrollment assisters, located on their online Navigator and Assister Resource Center. These resources have been developed as part of a larger project that Families USA - a national, not-for-profit health coverage advocacy organization - is launching to support the work of Affordable Care Act navigators and enrollment assisters. The consumer-friendly materials can be found here.

**Volunteer for NIAID HIV Studies**

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) investigators are seeking volunteers to help improve their understanding of HIV and how it causes disease, find new tools to prevent HIV infection, and develop new and more effective treatments.

Read about volunteer opportunities for NIAID HIV studies on the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland.

**Hofstra University Recruiting Gay Men and Women Living with HIV for Research Study**

Hofstra University is recruiting study participants to be part of a research project that will help researchers expand the knowledge of how people living with HIV can utilize a variety of tools to manage HIV disease. Previous studies have shown that managing HIV disease can greatly impact health outcomes. However, there have been few studies conducted in the US to understand how gay men and women living with HIV experience stress, access support, and interact with medical care from their point of view.
People living with HIV Eligibility Requirements:

- At least 18 years old
- Have access to Skype
- English speaking
- Willing to be interviewed for 30-45 minutes over Skype
- Living in the US and its territories
- Identify as a gay man or a woman

Upon study completion, you will receive an online gift card (e.g., to Amazon) worth $50. Steps will be taken to protect your confidentiality and the information you provide. If you have additional questions about the study, please contact the study team at (516) 463-5955 or healthculture235@gmail.com.