

Denver, Colorado
April 22, 1987

Dear Senator Armstrong,

I am writing in response to your column in today's Rocky Mountain News, which raises the question as to whether AIDS can be transmitted by saliva. I tried without success to raise this same issue beginning in January 1985, when I first became aware of it.

I was alarmed at the conclusions I had reached and I hoped I could push someone in one of the major news organizations to investigate and report the story—which was, in essence, that AIDS can be transmitted by saliva, that is, "by casual contact", contrary to the reassurance campaign of the Public Health Service.

I mailed out about 600 copies of my various AIDS articles to television news bureaus, newspapers and magazines. I addressed about 50 pieces of mail to individual reporters at the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Denver Post, the Rocky Mountain News, etc.—anyone who had written an article on the subject. Essentially, I got no response from any of them, nor from other agencies such as the AIDS information office of the U.S. Public Health Service, to whom I also sent a copy of my first and longest article. Apparently, none of them agreed with me, but neither did any of them want to argue about it. I think I did instigate several local reporters to produce yet another article with the standard theme as to how dreadful it was that people were so paranoid about AIDS and so unsympathetic to its victims. But, in the course of my vain attempt to raise the alarm, I figured out some things in respect to the politics of AIDS that you might be interested in.

I soon discovered that I wasn't alone in trying to raise the alarm. Many others were doing the same. In fact, that was just the reason for the stone wall I encountered—it had been erected to ward off the criticism of many people who had got hold of the same basic fact that I had got hold of. Despite the stone wall, and because of it, there has been a kind of underground AIDS information campaign, created by health professionals who didn't believe the official position of the PHS that "AIDS can't be transmitted by casual contact". The result of this, as a poll taken in the fall of 1985 showed, was that half of the American people didn't believe the assurances given them by the PHS and the news media.

I gradually realized that the reporters and editors I was trying to arouse were already well aware of the contradiction—"the virus is in saliva, but it can't be transmitted by casual contact"—and they had long since taught themselves to ignore it. The major news organizations fully committed themselves to the "no transmission by casual contact" position at the very beginning of the AIDS epidemic and subsequent pressure from outsiders like me only hardened the position.

There are basic reasons for this in the structure and character of the news media. There is an overwhelming concentration of major news organizations in New York and they dominate the whole industry. The people in these organizations have common attitudes on some basic issues of political philosophy but especially in regard to sexual liberation. There is a historical reason for this. The gay liberation movement, the woman's liberation movement, and the sexual liberation movement—there was considerable overlap among these three movements—were all concentrated in New York City. And people who sympathized with these movements tended to wind up in

the news media in large numbers. I think that for some of them, the basic commitment to sexual liberation is an article of faith. For others, conformity to very tolerant attitudes in regard to homosexuality etc. is a necessary condition for getting along in such organizations. In sum, the major news media were the natural allies of those who wished to minimize the danger of the AIDS epidemic so as to ward off public reaction against the newly established tolerance for the homosexual life style. It is manifest that they have gone out of their way to minimize the contagiousness of AIDS. They have also gone to a lot of trouble to create a more attractive image of the AIDS victim, for example, the massive publicity given to the Indiana school boy. The major news organizations have basically thrown themselves into a public relations campaign in respect to AIDS. The result is that any statements about AIDS which run counter to the reassurance campaign are ignored or discounted. At the same time, they immediately publicize anything that supports the "no casual contact" assurance—Dr. Ho's study, for example, which was turned into a national news story two weeks before it was even published. The statement you cited in your column, from Dr. Haseltine, and the saliva case reported in the Lancet, were news to me even though I am on the alert for such news items. Typically, the newspapers bury them, if they carry them at all.

The basic fact about AIDS is that it is a political problem first and a medical problem second. One won't be solved until the other is resolved. Because of the social issues which are tied to it, the AIDS epidemic has become the cause of a powerful coalition which includes the major news organizations. They had to commit themselves to the position that "AIDS can't be transmitted by casual contact" and now they are stuck with that position and entrenched behind it. No scientific evidence to the contrary is going to budge them, because their position was unscientific to begin with. So any realistic program to control the AIDS epidemic has to confront the political forces that veto any effective counter measures including the dissemination of true information as to how the disease is transmitted.

That is where the battle has to be joined. They must somehow be forced into a debate which will bring out the information they are ignoring and the questions they have refused to investigate.

It will all come out eventually, but how many will have caught the disease by then because they believed the false assurances? And when people realize that their sons and daughters are bound for early graves because they were given false assurances by public officials—obviously the AIDS issue is a ticking bomb for anyone who has been responsible for the campaign of false assurances.

I am sending you copies of the three items I wrote on the subject. You are welcome to use the information in pursuing your own inquiries. I require no acknowledgments.

I urge you to give this issue the highest priority. Surely you realize as well as I do that it is a life and death matter for many people—your friends and mine.

REGARDS,

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