

Response of Vice President Al Gore To AFC's Candidate Questionnaire

We can and must address the growing crisis of HIV/AIDS, in this nation, in Africa, and around the world. For years, my wife Tipper and I have been deeply involved in efforts to conquer the disease, and I am proud to be a part of an administration that has dramatically increased investments in research and support for people with HIV and AIDS. As president, I will continue to provide leadership from the White House in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Investing in Research, Treatment and a Cure

- We must invest in research to improve our ability to treat, prevent and cure this disease. Under the leadership of the Clinton-Gore Administration, we have already increased HIV/AIDS research at the National Institutes of Health by 50 percent. Our federal investments and the efforts of dedicated members of our nation's medical and research communities have already generated treatments that extend and improve the quality of life for individuals with AIDS and HIV. As Vice President, I have fought to support this administration's increases in AIDS and HIV related research. But we must do more. As president, I will continue fighting until we have a vaccine – and a cure.

Ryan White CARE Act

- We must also continue to support individuals living with HIV and AIDS, as well as their families and care providers. This administration has more than tripled funding of the Ryan White CARE Act to provide primary medical care, drugs critical to treatment, and other support services for people living with HIV and AIDS. As president, I will support reauthorization and increased funding of the Ryan White CARE Act, because I believe that Act is most important to us in fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Health Care

- Our public health insurance programs need to work to meet the needs of the AIDS and HIV patients who rely on them for medical coverage. The most effective treatments we have developed to extend and improve quality of life for AIDS and HIV patients are in the form of medicine, and we must ensure that these individuals have access to prescription drugs so that they can take advantage of these treatments. President Clinton and I have increased drug assistance for people with HIV/AIDS by 450 percent. And one of my first priorities as president will be to make sure that we add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare, to help HIV and AIDS patients it covers take advantage of these drugs. In addition, I will work to ensure that patients have access to cutting edge treatments by passing legislation that assures Medicare patients can participate in clinical trials and requires all health plans to allow patients to participate in clinical trials. These measures will not only provide access to the latest treatments for many more patients – they will also speed the development of new treatments and a cure.

It is also critical to increase access to health care coverage for patients with HIV and AIDS. I was an early advocate for legislation to help individuals with these and other chronic diseases to get health care coverage before they became too sick to work. And, as Vice President, I was a strong supporter of the Work Incentives Improvement Act and its measures allowing workers with HIV/AIDS to buy into Medicaid. The Administration also fought to increase access to private coverage for people with AIDS/HIV, by fighting for and signing the Kennedy-Kassebaum Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, which banned insurance companies from discriminating against people living with HIV and AIDS.

I believe we must take special care of those patients who are most vulnerable. I have fought to protect Medicaid – which at some point during the progression of their condition serves 50% of those living with AIDS. And I fought for a new minority AIDS initiative, with over \$245 million invested in communities of color.

Medical Privacy

- Patients with AIDS and HIV should not have to worry about who will see their medical records. I will expand current protections and fight for legislation to ensure that private medical information is not released inappropriately without written consent of the patient. And I will give patients a new private right of action and new criminal and civil penalties to ensure that individuals who have been harmed by the inappropriate release of private medical information have adequate legal recourse.

Housing for People Living with AIDS

For too many Americans living with AIDS, poverty is nearly as much of a threat as the disease itself. Without help, many would be forced to live in unfit housing or become homeless. Studies show that people with HIV/AIDS are at increased risk for homelessness and have more problems obtaining access to affordable housing. That is why I have been a strong advocate for the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) Program at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. HOPWA provides critical housing and other support services that:

- Help people with HIV/AIDS remain in their homes by providing rental assistance and supportive services such as meals, transportation, and counseling; and
- Provide housing to people with HIV/AIDS and their families facing homelessness. By providing housing and other critical support services, this program helps keep families intact, and assures that individuals with HIV/AIDS have the support they need. Most people that HOPWA serves have incomes of under \$1000 a month.

I am proud that the Clinton-Gore Administration is fighting for increased funding for HOPWA. This year's budget request includes \$260 million for HOPWA, 12% more than last year. These grants will mean that people fighting AIDS won't have to also fight to keep a roof over their heads.

Education and Prevention

- The heart of our efforts to fight AIDS/HIV must be education and prevention. Through community intervention and education, encouraging individuals to avoid behaviors that increase the risk of disease, and increasing the number of people who know their HIV status, we should strive to prevent as many Americans as possible from ever experiencing the suffering caused by this disease. That is why President Clinton and I have increased funding for HIV prevention, community intervention and education, and proposed new measures to further improve our investment in these goals, including \$400 million to end racial disparities in American health care and end the crushing burden of AIDS in the African American community. As president, I will work with community groups to expand the reach and improve the effectiveness of these education programs.

AIDS Abroad

- Our efforts to fight HIV and AIDS cannot end at home. No area of the world has been harder hit by the AIDS epidemic than Sub-Saharan Africa. AIDS has already taken a tremendous economic, political and humanitarian toll on the countries of the region, and threatens much worse. This past January, I chaired the first meeting of the United Nations Security Council on the disease – indeed, the first such meeting on any health-related issue – at which I announced our Administration's proposal to invest \$150 million to assist efforts to combat the international AIDS pandemic and contribute to international infectious disease prevention efforts. And this is only the first step. I am committed to a comprehensive plan for action to fight the disease worldwide.