

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## *AIDS: Money for National Research...*

Charles Krauthammer [op-ed, June 12] misses the principal reason for a concerted federal effort, like the Manhattan Project, to stop the AIDS epidemic. AIDS is a newly discovered disease with no proven treatment now available; it is usually fatal within a year. Yet, medical research has advanced rapidly and, with sufficient resources, a treatment may soon be found that will dramatically alter this grim picture.

It will not detract from the legitimate needs of other sick or disabled people for the federal government to seize this opportunity. In fact, AIDS research surely will lead to breakthroughs in other medical research, just as basic cancer research laid the groundwork for discovery of the AIDS virus.

Mr. Krauthammer also suggests that an expanded effort is not required because "only" 270,000 cases are expected by 1991 and most of those will be among gay men and intravenous drug users. It is, of course, offensive to civilized values to suggest that the lives of these people, and of their sexual partners and new-

born children, are any less valuable than any other lives that might be lost. Mr. Krauthammer discounts the dangers of heterosexual transmission, but given the long dormancy period of the virus, the evidence is not in. Meanwhile, millions of people may unknowingly risk infection while we waste precious years of medical progress and public education.

Contrary to Mr. Krauthammer's assertion, the gay and lesbian community of this country does not oppose AIDS antibody testing. We believe that counseling and voluntary testing are a necessary part of any prevention campaign, and that those efforts must be greatly expanded. When given the needed information, people have altered their behavior dramatically and substantially reduced the transmission of AIDS.

Mr. Krauthammer mentions no need to expand these efforts, but quickly blames those who are infected for having "collaborated" in contracting this disease. Shame on him.

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## *... And for the World Health Organization*

The spreading epidemic of AIDS was recognized as having sufficient economic and political ramifications to require special discussions at the seven-nation industrial summit conference in Venice. This was a welcome and appropriate action, as was the recognition by the planners that greater international cooperation through the World Health Organization is required.

Paradoxically, this occurred at a time when the organization is facing the most serious fiscal crisis in its history.

This little publicized fact is due almost wholly to the failure of the United States to pay, as yet, its assessed obligations for 1986 and 1987. Only \$10 million of the \$61.7 million due in January 1986 has been received by the World Health Organization, and no funds have been made available to WHO in payment of the 1987 assessment, which was due Jan. 1. Facing a deficit that now exceeds more than \$100 million, the World

Health Organization has had no choice but to reduce both programs and staff.

In discussing initiatives to deal with AIDS, the president's position at the summit was an embarrassing and awkward one. The United States is the only industrialized country in default in its payments to WHO, and at the same time the United States has by far the most serious problem with AIDS. There is a universally acknowledged need for far more concerted and coordinated international activity, but the one organization that could provide necessary leadership is crippled by the default in payments by the United States.

It's too bad the president didn't take the opportunity offered by the summit to announce that the United States has made arrangements to meet in full its financial obligations to WHO.

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