

April 25, 2005

Mr. Charles Henry
Chair of the Board
AIDS Action Foundation
1906 Sunderland Place NW
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Chuck:

Please accept this letter as formal notice of my resignation from the AIDS Action Foundation Board of Directors, effective April 30, 2005.

It has been a privilege to serve on the AIDS Action Council or Foundation Board continuously since the late 1980s, when AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA) took the unordinary step of asking me (a member of neither APLA's Board nor staff) to serve as the organization's representative on the AIDS Action Council Board. During my years of work within the AIDS movement, some of the most rewarding time spent has been with AIDS Action. I shall long remember listening in awe to former AIDS Action leaders Pat Christen, Tim Sweeney, Jean McGuire and Tom Sheridan patiently explain to this less supple-minded Board member the intricacies of the Ryan White Care Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and their proposed strategies related thereto.

Recently, I have read commentary on AIDS Action expressing the view that "the effectiveness of the insider-outsider strategy has always been something of a myth" and generally just serves the insiders themselves. I disagree. I believe that dual-track activism is precisely the formula that has enabled the AIDS movement to make some progress. T-shirt-wearing constituents marching in crowded streets, while coat and tie wearing AIDS policy experts negotiated in office suites, was very much the right approach. To a significant extent, it still is. But in order to succeed, this formula requires attentiveness, sensitivity, and responsiveness on the part of policy leaders toward the grass roots constituency it is entrusted to represent—qualities that AIDS Action has historically shown, but more recently has too often lacked.

As you know, my sentiments on this topic are not new and my discomfort has been building up over time. I began giving voice to these concerns at a Council Board meeting at which I briefly spoke as a Foundation Board member in Winter of 2003. My concern spiked sharply when, while attending AIDS Action's largest annual public event (Los

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Angeles, May 2004), I was aghast to hear our Foundation Board representative in his on-stage comments, brand as “wrong” those who take issue with the Bush administration’s level of support for the fight against AIDS. I should note that this Board member very graciously accepted my criticism of his comment at the following day’s Foundation Board meeting and pledged to refrain from such comments in the future. But I think it important to ask ourselves what led this longstanding and well-informed Board member to believe initially, as I know he did, that his comment was appropriate in representing AIDS Action. Moreover, what steps has AIDS Action taken to dispel this notion? Do not AIDS Action’s inadequate answers to these questions make understandable why we would now find ourselves labeled in good faith by some as being the Bush administration’s voice to the AIDS community? (Chuck, I know that you have of late pressed for AIDS Action to issue a “Report Card” on the Bush administration, and I wish you God’s speed in getting that done.)

Of course, one misguided comment from a well-intentioned Board member does not define an organization’s policy. Nor does one ill-advised event sponsorship decision by our respectable Executive Director—particularly when that unfortunate blowup was primarily the result of misrepresentations and other bad acts by parties not directly associated with AIDS Action. As you know, I was quick to defend both AIDS Action and Dr. Martin during the Christmastime crisis of last year (see attached example) and I have no regrets about doing so.

Our reluctance to endorse AIDS Vote is another matter. So, too, is the posture that I have seen gain ground within our organization that we should not knuckle under to pressure from AIDS activists. I believe we *are* AIDS activists! If in AIDS Action’s strategic view there was unwise platform language associated with this voter registration drive, then we should have considered launching our own. If supporting and/or engaging in a voter registration drive targeting our core constituency--the most basic organizing tactic for any interest group--would be too offensive to those within the Bush administration who provide us with access and an occasionally sympathetic ear, then I urge AIDS Action to rethink the equity of this bargain.

I do not recall the AIDS Action of the past being timid in confronting the Clinton administration over the deadly cowardice of its position on needle exchange, despite the existence of much more valuable relationships within that administration than exist within the present. I cannot subscribe to a policy of timidity toward this Bush administration, which is callous and evil to its core with respect to the ongoing domestic HIV crisis and all of the root causes of its perpetuation. It’s not that I believe there to be no place for the AIDS Action of today--it’s that I believe the AIDS Action of today is no longer a place for me.

Over the past several months I have endeavored to move the Foundation Board and our Executive Director on these issues, but without success. I understand majority rule and clearly my views on strategy are in the minority. I do, however, think it important to state that I received several specific commitments from the Executive Director to look into and respond to various issues I had raised. In each and every one of those instances no response ever materialized. You may recall that during our last Foundation Board conference call Dr. Martin acknowledged having neglected to follow up with me on certain matters and pledged to have an e-mail response to me by the following Monday. No response has ever been forthcoming.

My resignation is not intended to be a blow to AIDS Action and I am hopeful it will not be. Unlike most Council Board members and some Foundation Board members, I do not formally represent any constituency. Thus, I believe my resignation per se will not be of great consequence. I do, however, respectfully suggest that my views may be at least loosely representative of an important body of AIDS activists who find themselves increasingly

estranged from the direction of this organization. I have sought in recent months to address the causes of this estrangement, but my efforts have been perhaps insufficiently skillful or otherwise lacking. Please know that my willingness to help AIDS Action in this regard will continue as a former Board member should you wish to call on me.

Lastly, please find enclosed my contribution of \$8,500 as satisfaction of my “give or get” obligation to AIDS Action for the privilege of serving on the Foundation Board for the first four months of 2005. I make this contribution for the following reasons:

- 1) I remain a supporter of AIDS Action’s mission. My support of the organization has lessened for the reasons stated above. It has not vanished. Moreover, I have no quarrel with those organizations or individuals who believe that their continued membership is in the best interest of their constituents and am pleased to support them in their ongoing work with AIDS Action.
- 2) I believe in, take seriously, and have always met AIDS Action’s policies regarding Board members’ financial commitments.
- 3) Over the years, I have seen some organizations large and small, as well as individual Board members, withdraw from AIDS Action (most often for financial reasons—but on rare occasion due to policy disputes) and sometimes leave their dues in arrears. It has always struck me as inequitable to hold a Board seat and its commensurate policy influence for any period of time without having honored the financial obligation that goes with it.

I thank AIDS Action for its extraordinary accomplishments over the years in advancing the interests of people with HIV/AIDS. I wish the Boards and staff all the best in the important work that lies ahead. And may the upcoming Report Card on the Bush administration reflect both the astute research for which AIDS Action has always been deservedly credited, as well as the courage and candor needed to unite a constituency.

With much appreciation,

Craig R. Miller

P.S. In honor of Ken Malone and his tireless and selfless efforts in overseeing AIDS Action’s finances, I ask that my enclosed contribution be attributed to sponsorship of the next AIDS Action event in Houston. Thank you.

cc: AIDS Action Foundation Board members
AIDS Action Council Board member
Dr. Marsha Martin

Enclosures