

Sex, Religion, and AIDS

By James Glassman

You would think the country that contributes twice as much money to fight AIDS globally as the rest of the world combined, and whose drug companies developed the medicines that stopped the progression of HIV, would get a little applause, or at least respect, at a giant conference on AIDS like the one held in Bangkok in July.

But you would be wrong. The country in question, of course, is the United States, and instead of praise, it got vilification. Why? The reason that resonated most was that “the Bush Administration panders to the religious Right,” in the words of Sebastian Mallaby, a Brit and *Washington Post* columnist who otherwise admires Bush’s AIDS policy.

Specifically, as Bill Bowtell, president of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organizations, put it, “The money was to be spent as the United States wished—to promote abstinence from sexual activity” even though “there is simply no scientific or evidence-based research to support the claim that abstinence works to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.”

Rupert Everett, the movie actor, condemned the U.S. at the Bangkok conference for “its judgmental attitude toward this subject we are dealing with—sex.” And Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) said “an abstinence-until-marriage program is not only irresponsible, it’s really inhumane.”

All of these criticisms fit the stereotype promoted by Europeans and fellow American sophisticates: that the President and his supporters are religious nuts

who think sex is bad and are imposing their pious values in a dangerous way on public policy.

In fact, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief will spend less than 7 percent of its budget on abstinence programs. Abstinence is “A” in the U.S. Agency for International Development’s balanced “ABC” approach to prevention (“B” is “be faithful,” and “C” is “condoms”). And it clearly works. Just ask Yoweri Museveni, president of Uganda, where the national prevalence of HIV infection dropped from 15 percent of the population in the early 1990s to 5 percent in 2001.

Museveni told the Bangkok conference that “AIDS is mainly a moral, social, and economic problem” and that the best way to fight it is with “relationships based on love and trust, instead of institutionalized mistrust, which is what the condom is all about.” The key to the drop in infections in Uganda was a delay in the average age of a woman’s first sexual experience and a reduction in the number of her partners. Abstinence works.

As for condoms, they work, too, and the U.S. advocates their use. In fact, the State Department reports that this year America will donate 550 million condoms to poor countries (compared with 186 million in 1999 under Clinton).

Yes, the United States is a religious country. The Declaration of Independence says that people are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” Our Constitution prescribes tolerance as well, and makes citizens responsible for their own judgment. As my col-

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league Michael Novak writes, “The whole point of liberty is this: Every choice makes a difference, for the fate of every soul and for the fate of the republic.”

AIDS is a terrible disease, but we know it can largely be prevented by responsible behavior. Certainly, policymakers can’t expect every young person to abstain from sex before marriage. But to devote one dollar out of 15 to programs that encourage abstinence is not “irresponsible” or “inhumane.” Quite the opposite.

The real question is how people like Bowtell, Everett, and Lee can miss this point. One answer is that they instinctively hate the U.S. for its religiosity. Another is that they consider sex primal and irresistible. A third, much more troubling, is that many people simply don’t believe humans have free will. Such a belief in personal helplessness is the foundation stone of socialism and fascism.

President Bush’s AIDS program is built on a very different base: a trust in well-informed people to make good decisions, a respect for strongly held religious and moral principles, and a belief in the beneficial power of sound science in a free economy. Those are values we need to stick with—no matter what our oh-so-sophisticated critics say.



Tribune of the Trial Lawyers

By Grover Norquist

On June 28, the United States transferred power from the occupying coalition to the Iraqi provisional government led by Iyad Allawi.

A little more than a week later, John Kerry's selection of North Carolina senator John Edwards as his running mate signaled a formal power transfer of a different kind: the handover of the Democratic Party from Organized Labor to Trial Lawyers. Neither of the other building blocks of the Democratic Party were in a position to assume control: The solid South has joined the other team, and the African-American vote, though the largest Democratic voting group, has only been employed to row the Democratic boat, not invited to steer.

John Edwards' status as the tribune of the small-but-wealthy-and-powerful trial lawyer class is his only asset. He doesn't bring a state to the ticket, as Lyndon Johnson did with Texas in 1960. He doesn't bring ideological balance as Joe Lieberman did for the more liberal Gore; as Nixon did for Eisenhower; and as George H. W. Bush did for Reagan.

In fact, Edwards is running for Vice President partly because his left-of-center voting record would have made it difficult for him to get elected to a second term. While John Kerry was rated the most liberal senator by *National Journal*, Edwards was tied for second most liberal with two others—Ted Kennedy and Barbara Boxer.

And Edwards doesn't bring *gravitas* or experience. He had no political role before

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his now less-than-one term as senator.

The selection of Edwards has energized the sleepy part of the center-right coalition—businessmen and women, the self-employed, and professionals like doctors. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce announced that while it has never bothered to make an endorsement in a Presidential campaign in the past, it is making one against the trial lawyer Edwards. The Democrat who runs the National Association of Manufacturers is doing the same.

Republican politicians in the 1940s and '50s used to rail against the labor union bosses. At that time, strikes paralyzed whole industries and regions, and one third of the workforce was paying union dues. Union membership as a percentage of the entire workforce has fallen from 20 percent in 1980 to 13.5 percent today (encompassing 33 percent of government workers and 8 percent of private sector workers).

Few small businessmen or professionals wake up fearing that their three employees will join a labor union. But every businessman or woman, every self-employed doctor, nurse, or professional, has a very real fear that a baseless lawsuit could cost thousands of dollars and days

out of his or her life. Labor unions drain \$8 billion in dues from workers forced to pay dues; trial lawyers extract \$200 billion from the economy and keep \$40 billion for themselves.

While the Edwards selection energizes congenital Republicans in the small business community, Kerry's greatest danger may come from John Edwards' natural enemies in the Democratic Party—every single Democrat who hopes someday to be President himself. If Kerry wins, the Presidency is closed to other Democrats in 2008 as Kerry runs for re-election. Edwards, who has parlayed a four-year stint in the Senate into a Presidential bid and Vice Presidential nomination, is fully capable of using eight years as Vice President to lock up the Democratic nomination in 2012.

This contrasts with the incentives the Bush-Cheney ticket gives to all Republicans with Presidential ambitions. They know Cheney's health problems leave an open seat for Republicans in 2008, assuming a Bush-Cheney victory this November. A loss, on the other hand, means a fight upstream against a Democratic incumbent.

Edwards' one asset against the near and far enemies he motivates is his ability to raise trial-lawyer dollars. Those funds might allow the Democratic ticket to forgo public funds in the last months of the campaign. Should the additional money allow Kerry and Edwards to win, there will be no doubt who is in charge of the modern Democratic Party, and perhaps the nation.

