

Why I'm joining the funeral procession 9/22 and 2pm, Grant and Liberty (downtown)

Written by Max Ray

Tuesday, 22 September 2009 00:47 -

I'm in Pittsburgh this week to tell the G20 what I think needs to be done for people with AIDS and all of us affected by the recession. I'll be telling them tomorrow (Tuesday, 9/22) at 2pm by joining a funeral procession from the corner of Liberty and Grant right to their meeting place, to show what will happen if they ignore AIDS or continue to make bad choices about fighting the disease.

The recession has hit people hard all over the world. The G20 is meeting this week in the only state in the country without a budget -- our legislature can't figure out how to balance our budget given cuts at the federal level, decreased tax revenue, closing businesses, and increased need for services. Not having a budget as we begin the fiscal year means that AIDS service organizations, already operating on chronically tight budgets despite the tremendous need for services, now have no budget at all.*

The debate over how to allocate resources is playing out not only on the Pennsylvania state budget level, but at the G20 this week. In fact, the discussions at the G20 will have direct implications on Pennsylvania's monetary woes. The G20 will debate whether we end the recession by bailing out bankers or investing in people and public health. They also help shape how easy it is for factories that once employed workers and paid taxes in Pennsylvania to pick up and move overseas where they get away with paying ridiculously low wages and taxes.

The G20's decisions on how to spend money not only affect AIDS services locally, but those same decisions - whether to put corporations and bankers first, or people and health first - also impact access to AIDS services worldwide. Before the recession, the 20 richest countries in the world were finally working together to fund HIV prevention and treatment programs. The Global Fund for AIDS, TB, and Malaria had administered over 15 billion dollars, saving millions of lives. Life expectancies were rising in Africa for the first time in decades. But when the global recession hit, the wealthiest countries in the world went back on their promises to continue to expand the Global Fund.

Put simply, this means that people in treatment for HIV and TB are running out of medicine and the funds to buy more aren't available. Stopping treatment for HIV and TB is deadly, and increases the risk of creating drug-resistant "superbugs." For example, in Malawi, delayed disbursement of Global Fund funds are causing stock-outs (no AIDS drugs are available in the clinics across the country).

When the recession first began, author Naomi Klein predicted that global leaders would use the crisis to increase privatization, deregulation, and globalization. She went on to predict that they would do so on the backs of the most vulnerable people in the world, specifically poor people in the Global South living with HIV and AIDS.

(<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26315908/#30610029>)

Whether it is at the level of the state legislature figuring out how to balance the budget or at the

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level of global cooperation to end AIDS, the recession forces us to choose. Do we respond to the crisis by channeling money and power away from the people in need, and into the coffers of the private financial institutions that caused the crisis? Or do we respond to the crisis by taking the opportunity to build infrastructure, improve public health, create local jobs (where ever that local may be), to, in short, do the very things the at government is supposed to do?

One concrete way the G20 can show they are on the side of the people and against global greed is to take time at this week's summit to recommit to the Global Fund (and, most importantly, to actually spend the money they've promised) and to make a plan for to keep the promise made achieve universal access to HIV treatment and prevention.

If you agree, join me tomorrow:

2 pm, Tuesday 9/22, corner of Grant and Liberty

*Even when the legislature decides on a budget, federal funding is being delayed to all AIDS service organizations in Western and Central PA due to mismanagement of funds at the state bureaucracy (not within the organizations themselves, rather at the state office that manages the grants).