Five Takeaways from the Obama HIV/AIDS Plan

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Here are five things you should know about the Obama administration’s new HIV/AIDS policy and its just-released strategy and implementation plan on the subject:

1. The plan is more open about the issue of racial and gender disparities among HIV-positive people than a report from a Republican administration likely would have been. According to the report:

   Significant racial disparities in HIV infection exist in the United States. According to CDC, the overall rate of HIV diagnosis for Blacks was roughly eight times the rate for Whites in 2006. The HIV diagnosis rate for all Black males (119.1 per 100,000 population) remains the highest of any racial/ethnic group and is more than seven times that for White males, twice the rate for Latino males, and twice the rate for Black females. Additionally, the diagnosis rate for Latino males was approximately three times that for White males. The HIV diagnosis rate in 2006 for Black females and Latinas was more than 19 times and 5 times (respectively) the rate for White females. Disparities in HIV infection also exist between gay and bisexual men and heterosexual populations. Recently, the CDC announced that gay and bisexual men in the United States are 44 to 86 times more likely to become infected with HIV than heterosexual men, and 40 to 77 times more likely to become infected than women.

2. For the most part, the policies listed in the report are not that different from what Republican administrations have proposed, including encouraging faster approvals for HIV/AIDS drugs from the FDA, strong encouragement of HIV testing so that more people know their infection status, better coordination of existing resources, and not relying on the federal government alone (!) to solve the problem.

3. Not coincidentally, the Washington Post reports that the White House praised the Bush administration’s approach to the issue, saying that the report “credits the Bush administration for its efforts to address the disease.” (A word search of the strategy, however, reveals that the praise is less overt than the Post piece suggests. President Bush’s name appears only once, with respect to his multi-billion dollar effort to combat HIV/AIDS abroad.)

4. Thus far, the bulk of the criticism of the Obama plan is from the left, specifically from the AIDS Healthcare
Foundation (AHF). According to AHF president Michael Weinstein, quoted in an ABC News report:

This strategy is a day late and a dollar short: 15 months in the making, and the White House learned what people in the field have known for years. . . . There is no funding, no ‘how to,’ no real leadership.

In addition, according to this item by the Guardian’s Sarah Bosely, “The AHF, the largest global Aids organisation, has Obama in its sights over his Aids policy at home and abroad. George Bush, it is beginning to be muttered, did better.”

5. The major conservative objections to the policy will be in the areas of the endorsements of needle exchange, condom distribution, and sex education, which are neither news nor surprising in any way. After 15 months of study, the administration does not appear to have broken much new ground on this issue. No wonder the Left appears disappointed.