

**REPORT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL  
COMMISSION ON THE HUMAN  
IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS  
EPIDEMIC: SUBMITTED TO THE  
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES**

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Report of the Presidential Commission on the Human Immunodeficiency Virus Epidemic:  
submitted to the President of the United States by Various

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**VARIOUS**

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**THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION**  
on the  
**HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY  
VIRUS EPIDEMIC**



Submitted to  
The President of the United States

June 24, 1988

*"No man is an Island, intire of itselſe . . .  
Any man's death diminishes me,  
because I am involved in Mankinde."*

—John Donne  
(1573–1631)



# LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION ON THE HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS EPIDEMIC**  
655 15th Street NW, Suite 901, Washington, D.C. 20005 (202) 245-2437

## **CHAIRMAN**

*Admiral James D. Watkins (Retired)*

June 24, 1988

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*Penry Pullen*

*Cory SerVaas, M.D.*

*William B. Walsh, M.D.*

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of all members of the Presidential Commission on the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Epidemic, I submit our final report.

One year ago, by Executive Order, you created an advisory commission to investigate the spread of the HIV and the resultant acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). In so doing, you tasked the Commission to advise you on the public health dangers, including the medical, legal, ethical, social, and economic impact, of the epidemic. You also asked the Commission to recommend measures that Federal, State, and local officials could take to protect the public from contracting the HIV, assist in finding a cure for AIDS, and care for those who already have the disease. You asked that the final report be submitted no later than June 24, 1988. By unanimous agreement of all its members, this report is believed to have fulfilled the requirements outlined in your Executive Order.

Your decision to take one year to develop a comprehensive national strategy to deal with the incredible complexity of the HIV epidemic was sound. In retrospect, it could not have been effectively developed in less time. In more than 40 hearings, the Commission listened to testimony from over 600 of the most knowledgeable witnesses that could be assembled on the HIV epidemic. The complexity of issues surrounding the HIV is exemplified by the nearly daily development of new scientific information about the virus which will continue to demand frequent review by officials in the public and private sectors.




Mr. President, you afforded the Commission an unusual opportunity to view contemporary American society through the lens of the HIV. We saw firsthand: the frightening specter of drug abuse and its relation to the spread of the virus; an overly burdened and unnecessarily costly health care system; a drug development system unresponsive to the fast-changing unknowns surrounding this epidemic; absence of integrated health education and health promotion programs in our schools; an increasingly litigious and adversarial relationship between providers and consumers of health care; and a society in which some members were still too quick to reject, deny, condemn, and discriminate, resulting in a situation that neither bodes well for the individual nor the public health when dealing with this epidemic.

But what we also saw firsthand was the spark of human spirit which rises high when faced with the gravest of human tragedies. We saw incredible goodness across the nation and a fundamental compassion, expressed by thousands of Americans, from health care professionals to hospice volunteers to local firemen, police, and emergency workers. We heard from young people who daily demonstrate personal bravery and integrity in standing up for their HIV-infected classmates who have been victims of the vilest of attacks by bullies inside and outside their schools. We heard from business leaders, community-based organizations, church and other humanitarian groups who have refused to succumb to the overload of work placed on them or the same old tired bureaucratic obstacles thrown in their way at every turn as they move to meet daily living needs of HIV-infected persons.

We found the HIV epidemic, then, to be much more than a medical crisis or a public health threat. While we found it a grave tragedy, we also saw the HIV epidemic as an opportunity to confront and begin to solve many of the problems our society faces. We saw an opportunity to begin to eliminate flaws in our health care system resulting in a better life for all Americans; we saw an opportunity to begin to educate our young people about their own human biology so that they can better appreciate the unique worth and dignity of themselves and others; we saw an opportunity to begin to eliminate discrimination against persons with HIV infection, as well as persons with other disabilities and illnesses, and embrace them as part of the mainstream of American life; we saw an opportunity to begin to turn the goodness that is out there, just waiting to be harnessed into an unbeatable army against this viral enemy that has captured early ground.

It is our hope, Mr. President, that you will: use our report as your national strategy; harness the goodness that awaits your effective leadership; continue to advance the nation in conquering the virus; and lead us to take advantage of waiting opportunities for more healthy and wholesome lives.

Sincerely,

  
James D. Watkins  
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)  
Chairman

