PS1 for 6/4/87#THE MANY QUESTIONS RAISED BY AIDS

A favorite question which reporters have asked of political leaders and prospective candidates during the last several months is, do you think AIDS will be an issue in 1988? The answer, of course, is yes, AIDS is a problem of many dimensions: medical, financial, legislative, political, educational, media, moral, and civil liberties.

AIDS is a medical problem because of the large and growing number of persons who require care, treatment, and protection against infection. Cases of full-blown AIDS now total 35,000 in the United States, of whom 20,500 have already died and no one has recovered.

The federal Centers for Disease Control estimates that at least one and a half million Americans are infected with the AIDS virus, all of whom are infectious to others. Estimates of the percentage of those who will eventually develop full-blown AIDS have been steadily raised, and Dr. Roy Schwarz, chairman of the American Medical Association Task Force on AIDS, now says, ""There is no reason to believe it will be less than 100 percent.''

AIDS is a financial problem because of the tremendous costs and the expected acceleration in the cost burden. The cost of caring for one AIDS patient ranges from $50,000 to $200,000. The federal Office of Technology Assessment has confirmed the prediction that the medical costs of AIDS will reach $8.5 billion by 1991, plus another $2.3 billion spent for research, education and blood screening tests.

The burden on our health care system, hospitals, Medicaid, insurance companies, and personal resources is growing rapidly. Hundreds of millions of dollars a year are now being spent to find a cure, but it is generally believed that there will be no cure in the foreseeable future.

AIDS is a legislative problem because of the dozens of AIDS bills

introduced into Congress and into State Legislatures on which legislators must vote.

AIDS is a political problem because, in the 1988 elections, all candidates for public office will be compelled to answer questions about AIDS and what to do about it. No candidate will be able to avoid addressing this issue, especially the legislative proposals and the costs.

AIDS is an education problem because demands for "AIDS education" are really demands that the schools teach children how to use condoms when they engage in sodomy or fornication. This is often described as "safe sex" education and is highly controversial.

AIDS is a media problem because the extensive coverage of AIDS raises questions of accuracy, judgment, emphasis, bias, taste, and public acceptability. The media problem involves the entertainment and advertising components of television, as well as news coverage.

AIDS is a moral problem because most of those with AIDS acquired the disease as a consequence of an act that is immoral or illegal (homosexual acts, IV drug use, prostitution), and because some got the disease as a consequence of the negligence of persons in positions of trust (through blood transfusions). A few got AIDS from unknown or innocent causes (babies and spouses of infected persons).

AIDS is a civil liberties problem involving, among other questions, the individual's right to select the health care personnel of our choice (after knowledge of whether or not they are AIDS carriers), the right to have transfusions from the blood of our choice (from persons known to be virus clean), the right to be in a hospital separated from other patients with a communicable disease, and the right to confidentiality of medical records.

While AIDS and the AIDS virus are of most immediate concern to all those who engage in high-risk behavior (sodomy, IV drug use, and

prostitution), AIDS should be a concern to everyone.

Everyone who engages in sexual activity, in or out of marriage, is at risk from any partner who has had other sexual experiences. Everyone is at risk because of the probability of entering a hospital for elective or emergency treatment and the possibility of needing a blood transfusion.

Everyone is also at risk from the possibility of an accident or an ordinary activity that allows an exchange of blood to take place. Examples of such ordinary activities are a fireman rescuing an injured person, a dental assistant or a nurse performing her regular duties, and skinned knees and cut fingers.

Everyone will feel the financial burden because those who engage in high-risk behavior are demanding that the high costs (of treatment, hospitalization, and research for a cure) be paid by those who don't engage in high-risk behavior.

Political candidates don't like to address the AIDS issue because it is inescapably involved with two of life's most unpleasant certainties: death and taxes. But they must, because AIDS is now part of our life.