

## **HIV / AIDS**

### **Press Accounts**

**Interview with Dr. Anthony Fauci, M.D., Associate Director of AIDS Research  
at the National Institutes of Health, along with Rep. Waxman.  
June 9, 1991**

#### **CNN Newsmaker Sunday**

##### Transcript

CARL ROCHELLE, CNN National Correspondent: Welcome to Newsmaker Sunday. In Washington, I'm Carl Rochelle. Those questions- for Dr. Anthony Fauci, associate director for AIDS Research at the National Institutes of Health; Democratic Congressman Henry Waxman, chairman of the Health and Environment Subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce Committee; and Daniel Bross, executive director of the AIDS Action Council, all today on Newsmaker Sunday.

Dr. Fauci, an awfully broad question, but will AIDS become the worst epidemic of our time? Is this possible?

ANTHONY FAUCI, M.D., Associate Director of AIDS Research, National Institutes of Health: Certainly. In fact, it's well on its way to that. When you say our time, you mean our generation-

ROCHELLE: Our generation or perhaps for all time.

Dr. FAUCI: Well, I'm not so sure for all time. It's very difficult to predict that. But certainly, it is now on its way to and will almost certainly rank as one of the most devastating epidemics.

ROCHELLE: In fact, we hear that it may become or has become the second leading killer of young men; is that correct?

Dr. FAUCI: Right. In - Well, it will soon be the second leading killer of young men in this country. One of the problems with the American public appreciating the enormity of this is that it is not an epidemic which is homogeneously spread throughout our population. If one looks in the United States, it started off as an epidemic among homosexual men, IV drug users; now we're seeing a real intensification of the epidemic in inner city areas, predominantly minorities and IV drug users, their heterosexual partners and children.

So, the normal, everyday, run of the mill American in Middle America looks around and doesn't see a lot of it and thinks that, well, how could this be such a devastating epidemic. And yet it's going to be insidiously thrust upon this nation of realizing that because if you go to other countries where you see more of a homogeneous spread, like in central Africa, then you really see the impact of it where a substantial proportion of the population is infected and a substantial portion of the population is going to die from that in certain of those countries.

ROCHELLE: Now Mr. Bross, why does it come down in that particular block? You said you had some figures on that. Why does it come down in that particular range of men?

DANIEL BROSS, Executive Director, AIDS Action Council: The CDC's projections are that AIDS will be the second leading killer of young men, the fifth leading killer of young women. And I think the response to your question is that is a group that is highly sexually active, they are young people, they are exploring

their sexuality, trying to understand their sexuality and they are not getting the AIDS education that this country needs to put forward to them so that they can take the proper precautions to protect themselves against the spread of the virus.

ROCHELLE: So, the biggest incidence is still sexually related?

Mr. BROSS: Absolutely. As Dr. Fauci mentioned, increasingly we're looking into injection drug users as a highly - a group at high risk.

ROCHELLE: Congressman, how do you find it, in overall terms? It's an issue you've been studying for years. Is it a major cause?

Rep. HENRY A. WAXMAN, (D-CA) Chairman, Subcommittee on Health and Environment, Committee on Energy and Commerce: Well, we had the first hearing of our subcommittee on this issue ten years ago when there was a disease that was so unusual - They didn't have the name AIDS, it was called Kaposi's sarcoma, it was a rare form of cancer, an opportunistic infection that came about because of the depression of the immune system. And over this ten years period, there have been ups and downs. The public has become alarmed about it and then complacent about it. And I think right now we're at a time, as we enter the second decade of AIDS, where the federal government has become complacent.

We are not funding this - dealing with this epidemic on an emergency basis. And I think part of the reason is because of what Dr. Fauci indicated. It first hit gay men, it has now gone into the underclass, the drug-abusing population and their sexual contacts, and people think, well, this is somebody else that's going to get AIDS, they don't think of it as a threat to them. But it is sexually transmitted, it is heterosexually transmitted and it is - we've only seen the tip of the iceberg. There's an estimate of over a million people who are infected and we've only seen a small part of those people with full-blown AIDS.

Our health care system's going to be devastated. It already is devastated in many areas of the country, especially the cities by this whole epidemic.

ROCHELLE: But Congressman, the interest in this, isn't it a reflection of the public? I mean, what the government is doing, what even the Congress is doing, this lack of interest in it and why. Why is there this lack of interest in it?

Rep. WAXMAN: I think people don't see it as a threat to them, but in fact it is a threat to them. It's a threat to them in many different ways and, therefore, we still after ten years are not acting with the attention we should to deal with prevention,-

ROCHELLE: Well, what should we be doing?

Rep. WAXMAN: Well, we don't have a magic bullet, such as a vaccine or a cure. But we know that it's sexually transmitted, so we need to explain to people, especially young people, that they're at risk. We need to avoid the squeamishness that we have about sex and drugs and explain to people who are involved in sexual activities and drug activity that they're at a risk and if they're going to engage in those activities, there are ways to lessen the risk - it won't eliminate the risk - but we've avoided doing that.

And we need to test people. We need to find out not just educating on a mass level, but on a personal level. If an individual has the infection and doesn't know about it, to explain to that individual that he or she is infected, so that, one, the individual can get care, for there are drugs now that can intervene and prevent - we hope for awhile anyway, maybe permanently - the infection from developing into full-blown AIDS, but also not to behave in ways that will transmit it to others.

ROCHELLE: We need to take a break. We'll be back in just a moment. Stay with us.

[Commercial break]

ROCHELLE: Dr. Fauci, we hear of drugs from time to time that offer promise. I hear reports about AZT and people come up with miracle cures that do or do not work. Is there anything that really will cure AIDS or prevent AIDS or help AIDS at all?

Dr. FAUCI: Well, when you talk about therapy, I think it - we shouldn't be talking right now in terms of cure in the classic sense, the way we've thought about cure traditionally in medicine where we've completely rid the body of the microorganism, in this case the AIDS virus. AZT is a drug that has clearly shown that it can help. And by help, we mean that if you give it to somebody who has AIDS, it can prolong the meaningful life span of that individual. If you give it early on in the course of infection to someone who's infected but not sick, it can delay the onset of clinical disease, but it does it for a limited period of time. You're talking about adding an extra 18 months, two years, or at the most, two and a half, three years.

What we need and, hopefully, what we'll get would be-

And this is something that I hope for in the 90's - is a combination of drugs that if administered early-on in the course of infection, that are relatively non-toxic, can actually delay the onset of disease or prolong the disease-free state for a significant period of time, hopefully measured in ten years or more, just like you have a situation where you don't cure a diabetic of diabetes, but you give them insulin and have them have a reasonably symptom-free life.

ROCHELLE: Is there promise of that in the near future?

Dr. FAUCI: Well, I think there's promise for getting towards that. You're not going to wake up one day and read in the newspaper that the miracle drug came that cured it. What you're going to see is a progression of better and better drugs. Right now with the basic research in what we call structural biology, where we know enough about the virus, you can tailor-make a drug to block a particular function of the virus. If those drugs which are in the hopper now and just starting to get tested truly work, which we have reasons to believe they will, then I think you're going to be able to see this kind of thing in the next several years.

ROCHELLE: Mr. Bross, are they moving fast enough?

Mr. BROSS: They certainly re not moving fast enough for people who are infected with the HIV virus. In response to Dr. Fauci's comments about AZT, fully 50 percent of the people that are now infected cannot tolerate using AZT and access to AZT is another issue. Congressman Waxman was talking about early intervention and the need for testing. I think it is absolutely essential that people early-on find out they're HIV status. One of the problems is when people find out their HIV status, the ability to get AZT early-on right after their diagnosis, they are constrained by that because of access to health care, access to insurance.

Congressman Waxman, for a number of years, has introduced legislation to try to adjust the Medicaid definition for ability to receive AZT and the Congress continues to not pass that legislation.

ROCHELLE: Should everybody be tested?

Mr. BROSS: I think the - That's a difficult question to answer. Testing in and of itself is not the answer to this disease. Testing in combination with access to therapies, as Dr. Fauci was talking about, access to AZT, testing in combination with education. Testing in and of itself does nothing, other than raise people's fear and raise people's expectation. It has to be coupled. It has to be provided as part of an entire program of care and prevention.

ROCHELLE: But testing would let you know that you have the virus.

Mr. BROSS: Finding out that you have the virus is little good if you don't have access to drugs to take care of that virus and to treat the virus.

ROCHELLE: But in fact, even if you have it and you have access to drugs, Dr. Fauci, you still die, don't you, ultimately? There is not a case on record where AIDS has been cured?

Dr. FAUCI: Well, in the sense of having someone who's had complete reversal, no. But I don't like to talk in those terms because when you say that, well, everybody's going to die anyway, that adds an air of despair to it that I don't think we need to do because even though the situation has been bleak, I think as drugs get better and better, someone who's infected now and gets treated early may be kept well long enough so that when the really good drug comes along three, four, five years from now that that person will then be able to go on that drugs. So, we really hesitate to just make a blanket statement that everybody that gets infected is going to die. I mean, we shouldn't say that because that's not the case.

ROCHELLE: Congressman, are you getting the help you need from the administration?

Rep. WAXMAN: I don't think we are getting the help we need from this administration.

ROCHELLE: What do you need? You need a leader? You need leadership? You need money?

Rep. WAXMAN: Well, we'll need both. We certainly need leadership. I think the president - if the president used his office as a bully pulpit to talk about the epidemic, to explain to people that it's not over and that there is a problem, and there's concern that everyone ought to have about the practices that spread the disease, that would be very helpful.

But we spent a long time passing legislation last year to provide money for testing, counseling, early intervention, drug therapy, money to help out the cities that are hard hit by the epidemic. We see the underscoring in this epidemic of the inadequacies in our health care system, most apparently from the AIDS problem, but not just for people that have AIDS, other diseases as well, people who don't have insurance, are left out of luck.

But in the bill that we adopted last year, we're now pleading with the Appropriations Committee to put money into it and they say to us there's not enough money, because they are now forced under the budget agreement to choose between education, NIH research, money for public health and money for testing and counseling and there's not enough money there.

ROCHELLE: Dr. Fauci, are you getting the support you need?

Dr. FAUCI: Well, I just want to get back to one other thing. I really disagree with Congressman Waxman. He's been extraordinarily helpful to use in the biomedical research community for the last decade for sure. But I get a little bit disappointed at the public's response. The president has, in fact, spoken out just exactly the way Congressman Waxman has said he wants him. He came to the NIH a couple of years ago, and he's come several times, and with press around has said exactly the same things that Chairman Waxman has said he wanted him to say. He has been very public about it. He has the secretary of Health and Human Services talking very publicly about the things that you're talking about, but the impact on the American people is that somehow they're not listening. So, to blame the president or to blame the secretary I think is being a-

Rep. WAXMAN: Tony, I'm not blaming him for not speaking out, I'm blaming him for a pattern in a lot of areas where he appears to be saying something and giving leadership, but they aren't there to do the work that needs to be done. If we don't have testing and counseling, early intervention, people are not going to come forward, find out about their status and

ROCHELLE: We need to take a break, Congressman. We'll come back and talk more about that in just a moment. Stay with us.

[Commercial break]

ROCHELLE: Welcome back to Newsmaker Sunday. In Washington, I'm Carl Rochelle. Our guests are Dr. Anthony Fauci, associate director for AIDS research at the National Institutes of Health; Congressman, Henry Waxman, Democrat of California and chairman of the Health and Environment Subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce Committee; and Daniel Bross, executive director of the AIDS Action Council.

Dr. Fauci, you were saying you don't have enough money. Whose fault is that? Is that Congress' fault?

Dr. FAUCI: I don't think it's anyone's fault. I think that the factor is that the money is not there. The congressional committees who appropriate money for research very much have - want to help and have been extraordinarily helpful. But when you look at what they have to deal with, the pot of money that they have, it just isn't there. And then on the other side of the coin, you get a lot of pressure from people saying are you doing too much for AIDS, and we hear that. I mean, are you hurting cancer, and heart disease, and diabetes. So, I don't think you Congress or the administration in this regard.

ROCHELLE: Mr. Bross, do you buy that argument?

Mr. BROSS: I'm going to have to disagree with Dr. Fauci- and some one mentioned earlier that the president had visited NIH and had spoken out publicly in the fight against AIDS, and I certainly applaud those efforts. But making speeches and visiting NIH is one thing, taking real Waxman was talking about a few minutes ago, is what is essential.

Last Thursday, the House of Representatives on the floor of the House voted to restore \$ 1.9 billion worth for the fiscal year - that's going to start October 1 - for the space station. The reason that vote took place and the reason the money was restored was because the president of the United States, the vice president called members of the House and said this program is important, please restore the money for the space station, we think it's important. The president of the United States, the vice president of the United States are not taking that leadership when it comes to the fight against AIDS.

ROCHELLE: Well, what you're talking about is priorities and, obviously, they've decided that some things are more important than other things.

Mr. BROSS: And as a representative of the AIDS activist community, that is where I have problems and where we have problems with this administration. A hundred and ten thousand Americans have died from AIDS. Over a million Americans are infected with the HIV virus, but yet we are spending this year, in the fiscal year that began October 1, the same amount of money for a space station as we are for the fight against AIDS in this country. I think we have some mixed-up priorities in this country.

ROCHELLE: Congressman? Priorities mixed-up? You're involved in that.

Rep. WAXMAN: We're the richest country in the world and we have said to the American people-

ROCHELLE: Dr. Fauci says the pot's not bottomless.

Rep. WAXMAN: Well, but let's look at what we're not doing in this country. We're not providing health care for Americans. This is the only country where we don't have a universal access health - access to health care. We have 35 to 37 million people without care and we tell them we don't have enough money in a society-

ROCHELLE: But to do something like that, you'd have to raise the tax burden on everybody.

Rep. WAXMAN: Well, that's the key. You have to either raise more revenues or decide to cut. And we're starting to cut the military, but we are cutting it after a huge buildup in the 1980's. Also in the 1980's under President Reagan, we gave a huge tax break to the wealthy and Bush ran on the promise he was not going to raise taxes.

ROCHELLE: But Congressman, let's not totally indict the United States because, if I understand correctly, this has become a problem now in more than a 150 other countries, that AIDS is not just a United States disease and what are they doing about it?

Rep. WAXMAN: But what are we doing about it? You know, Africa's a basket case. Asia is following along right behind Africa, they're going to have an explosion, and there are going to be millions and tens of millions of people are going to die. It's a tragedy beyond any of our comprehension. But in this country-

ROCHELLE: Are we doing anything to help them?

Rep. WAXMAN: Well, let's deal with America first. What are we doing about the problem here in the United States? We need to stop the behavior that spreads AIDS and that means we've got to reach people who don't even know that they have the infection.

ROCHELLE: You can't stop behavior, you can only advise them, you can only tell them-

Rep. WAXMAN: I know, but if people don't even know they're infected and their sexual partners don't know they're infected, they're going to act in ways that are going to continue to spread the disease. So-

ROCHELLE: So, you're saying mandating-

Rep. WAXMAN: Well, I think we need more testing. I don't think it has to be mandatory. We haven't even tried yet to do the voluntary testing and bringing in the high risk people who ought to be brought in to know that they have that infection. So, I am for more testing, more counseling, more behavior change-

ROCHELLE: Is that the answer, Dr. Fauci?

Dr. FAUCI: -extremely important, but I agree with Dan that you have to couple it with counseling, education and the availability of treatments for an individual who finds him or herself infected at that stage where they can benefit from therapy. It's a very complex situation. You have a health care delivery system that is not equipped to meet the burden that HIV infection is placing and will place on our society. So, though it is correct to say that we should have widespread testing, and I have been espousing that for years and years, you've also got to be concerned about the things that Congressman Waxman has been a leader in, and that is making sure that when people get - tested positive that they don't have something punitive against them, that they have some guarantees of their rights, their rights to their job, to their insurance-

Rep. WAXMAN: We're not disagreeing. We're not disagreeing.

ROCHELLE: Dr. Fauci, you have the last word. I'm sorry, we're out of time. Thanks for being with us today on Newsmaker Sunday. I'm Carl Rochelle, in Washington. Good day.