Anthony Fauci's Message of Hope, Learned During COVID-19 and HIV Battles

Elton John and global leaders honor the infectious disease expert with a lifetime achievement award.

December 4, 2020 By Trent Straube

Elton John, perhaps the world's most famous AIDS advocate, described Anthony Fauci, MD, as "one of the biggest champions in the history of the AIDS epidemic," adding, "It is his leadership and persistence that will ultimately help us overcome the COVID-19 pandemic."

John offered his praise of the United States' leading infectious disease expert in a virtual ceremony by the US Global Leadership Coalition honoring Fauci with a lifetime achievement award. The event was broadcast on World AIDS Day, December 1, and included guest speakers and a short conversation between Fauci and former first daughter Barbara Bush. (You can watch the full ceremony in the Facebook video below; the Fauci segment starts at the 56-minute mark.)

As the longtime head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, part of the National Institutes of Health, Fauci has led the battle against both HIV and COVID-19. And he has worked with numerous presidents, administrations and Congressmemebers. (It seems that trend will continue next year; it has been reported that Fauci has already spoken with President-elect Joe Biden, who asked Fauci to stay in his current role.)

> News: @JoeBiden tells me he spoke with Dr. Fauci this afternoon, asked Fauci to stay on in his position at NIAID, and also to serve as a chief medical adviser for him.

Clip coming up on @CNN on @CNNSitRoom

Full interview w Biden/Harris at 9 pm ET

— Jake Tapper (@jaketapper) December 3, 2020

While praising Fauci's work, John noted that during the early days of the AIDS epidemic, Fauci famously embraced activists and people living with HIV and incorporated their viewpoints into the design of drug trials and research. Though, as CNN points out, this embrace came after protests from activist groups like AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) over Fauci's handling of the epidemic.

Sir Elton John praises the work of Anthony Fauci, MDFacebook/USGLC

Bush brought up the fact that her father, President George W. Bush, had spoken privately with Fauci in 2002 about starting a program to tackle the epidemic in Africa. Fauci revealed to her that the president sent him on a secret mission to Africa to determine what was feasible. (Bush didn't want the media to know about his interest in the topic, fearing that they would derail the progress.) Fauci reported back on a hopeful program to eliminate mother-to-child transmission. President Bush responded that it was a great start, but that he wanted to do more because he

believed wealthy countries were morally obligated to do so. The end result was that Bush, during a 2003 State of the Union address, launched the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a massive multi-billion dollar program that continues to provide HIV meds and services to tens of millions of people. (For more about its accomplishments, see this POZ article on PEPFAR's 15th anniversary and watch the video below.)

During their Q&A, Barbara Bush noted that due to COVID-19, the world is experiencing a setback in its HIV strategies and asked whether Fauci believed we'd see an end to AIDS in his lifetime.

"I really do," he responded. "I'm known as a realist but also an optimist. I believe that as we continue the strong commitment—that has got to stay, you can't take your eye off the ball—but as the years go by, the tools that we get are better and better. This COVID thing? Good news: We have a couple of really good vaccines—so when COVID essentially becomes the rearview mirror, HIV is still going to be there. We have to keep our eye on that. The endgame is ending this [AIDS epidemic], and we're going to get there—and we're going to get there while I'm still around."

In related news, see "Experts Matter: Anthony Fauci, MD, Leads U.S. Efforts Against HIV and COVID-19" and "Activist Peter Staley Has Unmasked Dr. Tony Fauci and It Is Fabulous."

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