R.I.P. David Mixner, Trailblazing LGBTQ Political Strategist and HIV Activist

Known for advancing LGBTQ issues in the Clinton administration, Mixner was arrested in one of the first AIDS protests at the White House.

March 15, 2024 By Trent Straube

Longtime LGBTQ political strategist and AIDS activist David Mixner, who became a nationally known openly gay figure in the Clinton administration, died at his home in New York City on Monday, March 11, 2024. The cause was long COVID, reports The New York Times. He was 77.

Mixner was HIV positive and lost a partner of 12 years to the disease as well as, by his own count, 382 friends. While Ronald Reagan was president in 1987, Mixner participated in one of the first AIDS protests at the White House and was arrested along with 64 others, according to The Advocate. The LGBTQ magazine adds that Mixner assisted in drafting legislation during the 1980s that helped California address the growing epidemic.

> David Mixner shared countless stories with me of the work he did with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela, seven...
>
> Posted by Jim Cooney on Thursday, March 14, 2024

Mixner worked mostly behind the scenes, but he was an openly gay man at a time when that was rare and fraught with danger. He was pivotal in fighting antigay legislation in the 1970s and 1980s and in pushing the political establishment to support and fund LGBTQ issues. A longtime friend of Bill Clinton's, Mixner worked on Clinton's presidential campaign, influencing him to include AIDS and gay rights in his messaging. In 1992, at Mixner's prodding, Clinton became the first mainstream presidential candidate to publicly address an LGBTQ audience, the Times notes. When President Clinton failed to lift a ban on LGBTQ people in the military, as he had promised, and instead settled on the compromise policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," Mixner felt betrayed

and broke from Clinton. (The two eventually reconciled, and the policy was lifted under the Obama administration.)

In the past two decades, Mixner pivoted to writing, penning several books and a blog—he included many posts in a POZ blog under his name—and he presented a series of one-man shows. As the Advocate wrote in 2018: "A natural-born storyteller, the New Jersey native has documented his life in reverse; through a trilogy of one-man shows starting with 2014's Oh Hell No!, covering his coming out, facing HIV, and the Clinton years; 1969, about his experiences leading antiwar marches; and most recently, Who Fell Into the Outhouse?, covering his early life as a gay kid living in poverty. The latter ran in New York…and will soon be touring America. The shows are tools for Mixner to teach audiences about queer history. 'I really believe if we come out of nothing, if we don't know our history, then it's impossible to build a future,' he says."

David Mixner was a true titan of our movement. He co-founded the LGBTQ Victory Fund, the national organization dedicated...

Posted by Campbell Spencer on Tuesday, March 12, 2024

In 2021, the City University of New York School of Law started a fellowship in Mixner's name aimed at supporting students who intend to serve the LGBTQ and HIV communities. In a CUNY interview with Jose Abrigo, Mixner spoke about many aspects of his political work and life, including the AIDS epidemic, which emerged in the early 1980s just as gay rights activists were beginning to make advances:

> "And then AIDS hit. It was devastating, and I think many of us still have post-traumatic stress afterwards. I lost 382 friends to AIDS. I lost my partner of 12 years to AIDS. Our whole life was dominated. The community across the board mobilized when our government turned its back on us and wouldn't give us assistance. We created Project Angel Food, God's Love we Deliver to deliver meals to people with AIDS, and PAWS that walked people's dogs and took care of their cats, we did laundry. We all learned how to do IVs, so that we could treat them at home.

> "And many of us were included in a group that signed the pledge—I was one of the founders of the pledge—that no person with AIDS would die alone. Because many, many of our friends' families disowned them when they found out; my partner's family disowned him and wouldn't see him before he died. I don't know how a mother and father can do that, but that's another

issue. We made sure someone was there all the time by their bedsides."

In the same interview, Mixner mentioned having contracted COVID-19 and "a very bad case" of long-term COVID. "It's hell," he told CUNY. "Let me just tell you, I've been in critical care for the last ten years, and I have refused to surrender to it and have been given last rites four times, because every time I get out of the hospital, I would write another book. I did five stage performances off-Broadway. I kept reinventing myself, and, now because of my long-term COVID, it's more difficult for me to focus, believe it or not. I can't write like I did, so I started a video blog. Whenever God closes the door, I open it."

Funeral Service for David Mixner March 25th, 2024 - 10:00am EDT Church of St. Paul The Apostle 405 W. 59th Street. (59th...

Posted by Robin Johnston McGehee on Thursday, March 14, 2024

Visit Mixner's Facebook page for a collection of remembrances, obituaries, tributes and more.

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