Playing politics on AIDS
Reagan administration did too little for too long

By Lorettta McLaughlin

The first cases of AIDS had struck the United States so quickly that the White House response to the disease would have been different - quick, sympathetic and open-handed about spending public money to find out what was killing each of the sharp-shooters of American youth.

That's what the gay community was saying back in 1982, a year and a half after the discovery of this lethal new disease among homosexual men in New York and New Jersey.

At the time, it was considered an unfair judgment. To many, it was known about the disease, how deadly it was or how long the infectious agents would now contaminate the AIDS victims' blood transfusions. How costly the treatment. How many of the gay community's friends and loved ones might die.

The most prestigious science organizations in the nation, the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine, admitted last Thursday to being "shamefully ignorant" about the prospects for a nationwide AIDS catastrophe.

The nation's highest priority is to cover the costs of AIDS patients' medical bills and other medical care. Reagan has only spoken out over two other times on AIDS. But in his report to Congress last February, he promised an AIDS budget to $244 million. Yet, while asking to double to $410 million.

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