

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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## Fighting for Fair Health Care

BY KATRINA CIRALDO

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute for Allergies and Infectious Disease, once said that there were two periods in American medical history: before ACT UP and after ACT UP.

ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, will be marching on Wall Street tomorrow in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of its founding. The group has branched out from its titular cause in recognition of serious weaknesses in U.S. health infrastructure.

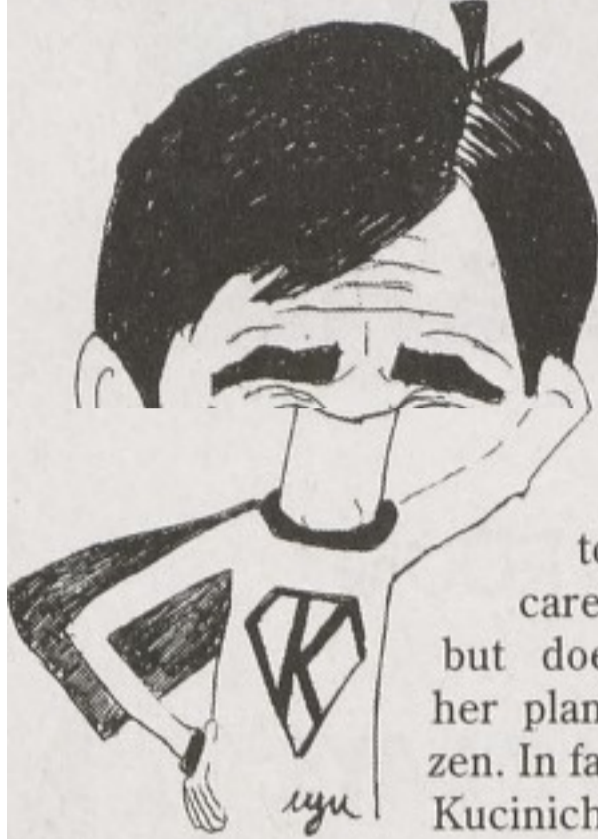
Early in the AIDS epidemic, ACT UP took a stance against bureaucratic sloth and discrimination against AIDS patients, paving the way for AIDS activism and other social justice movements. Part of its success came from its creative use of tactics, such as die-ins and relentless displays of civil disobedience. To demonstrate the need for housing homeless people with AIDS, the group members shut down Wall Street by setting up impromptu living rooms in the street with furniture they collected from dumpsters.

But, according to the World Health Organization, the United States ranks a pathetic 37th in the world for access to health services. Americans are being cheated and deceived, paying more than people in most countries while receiving lower quality health care or no health care at all. It is this discrepancy that ACT UP will address this Thursday, pointing the finger at profiteering insurance companies and a pharmaceutical industry that enjoys unregulated drug pricing. The protesters will also demand better housing for homeless and poor people living with HIV in New York City, a more traditional ACT UP demand.

Health care reform tends to re-emerge as a political rallying point every few election cycles, and the upcoming one is no exception. Unfortunately,

several of the most vocal democratic presidential frontrunners do not have their facts straight, and the health care solutions they propose will do little to change the system's mediocrity and unaffordability. Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) partially recognizes the problem: over 40 million Americans are

### KUCINICH FOR ACT UP



uninsured, and more than 40 million more have only partial insurance. Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY) is on the right track by proposing to expand health care for children but does not extend her plan to every citizen. In fact, Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) has

ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE MOLINA

provided the most comprehensive health care plan of any candidate—the Conyers-Kucinich plan (H.R. 676) is the only proposal for a single-payer system. Other plans claiming to be “universal” rely on limited vouchers, forced employer plans, and other half-measures, which fail to promise equal care for all.

ACT UP's demand for drug pricing controls

dovetails well with the march's first goal. The prices of prescription medications are rising faster than inflation, and the product monopolies provided by intellectual property law allow companies to set their prices arbitrarily. Pricing controls would correct this market irregularity so that struggling individuals don't have to choose between eating and taking their medication.

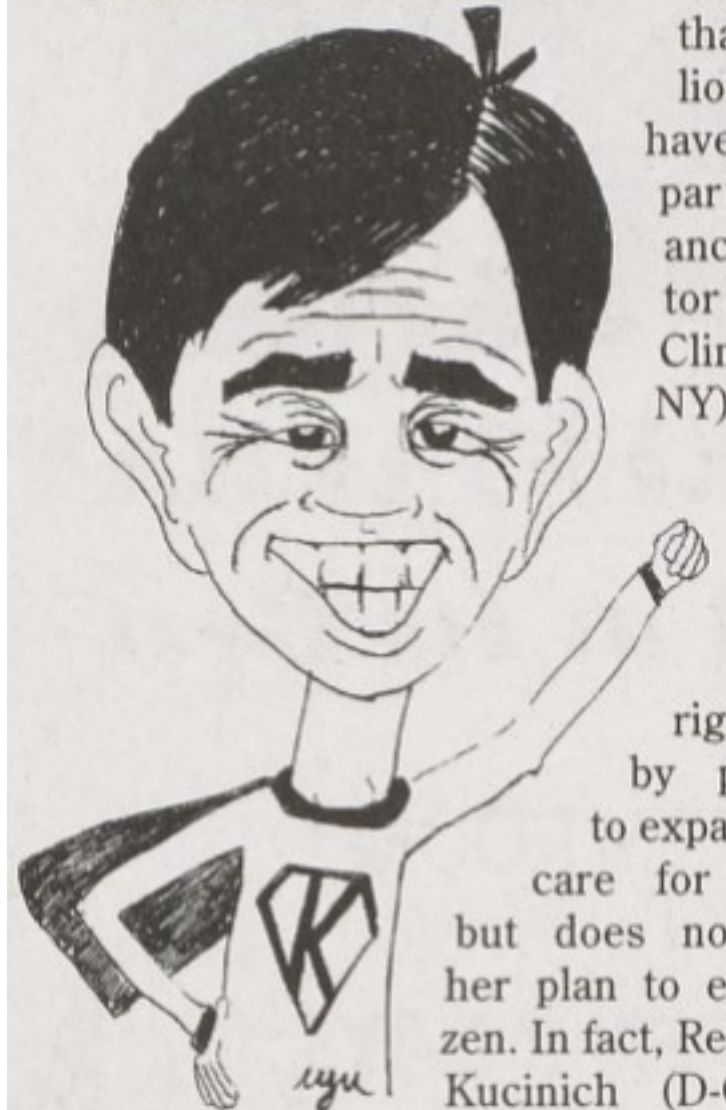
Lastly—and what should be very important to New York residents—marchers will be seeking better city housing policies for low-income residents living with HIV. The current housing program only provides assistance for individuals who have developed AIDS, leaving the not-quite-sick-enough out in the cold. (For example, the program designates that the T-cell count of individuals eligible for housing be below 200.) Besides its inhumanity, the current policy makes little economic sense: by forcing the homeless to become more ill before providing housing, city officials are prolonging and exacerbating future costs. Providing shelter for those with HIV will reduce future medical costs and improve the lives of the sick.

Tomorrow's march will commemorate ACT UP's 20th anniversary and reinvigorate the movement for true universal health care in the United States. Over 14,000 physicians have signed a petition through Physicians for National Health Care, a clear indication that our country cannot wait any longer. Hopefully tomorrow's action will bring lawmakers' attention to a practical solution that can provide health care for all, forcing Washington to take steps to give us what we deserve.

*Members of Columbia Global Justice invite you to meet at the gates at 116th Street at 11 a.m.*

*The author is a Columbia College junior majoring in history. Nick Serpe, a Columbia College first-year also contributed to the writing of this article.*

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