



PRESENTATION OF THE C. EVERETT KOOP HIV/AIDS HEALTH LEADERSHIP AWARD TO VADM C. EVERETT KOOP, MD, SCD, 13TH U.S. SURGEON GENERAL

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It is an honor and a privilege to award the first *C. Everett Koop HIV/AIDS Health Leadership Award*, sponsored by the Forum for Collaborative HIV Research, to Dr. C. Everett Koop himself. The award is for “Advancing the Nation's Progress in Fighting HIV/AIDS through Distinguished Service, Vision and Leadership.” No person embodies these words more than Dr. Koop, not only in the arena of HIV/AIDS but also in so many other areas of health care. Personally, and to many of us in the medical and public health fields, Dr. Koop is a courageous hero.

Dr. Koop was already a legend in the academic medical community before he became famous as our 13th Surgeon General. The many admirers of his Surgeon General years may not appreciate the breadth and depth of his previous accomplishments during a 35 year career as a pioneering pediatric surgeon. These accomplishments themselves were breath-taking. Had he stopped then, he would be a giant in the field of Medicine and would have a place in medical history. However, as we now know, Dr. Koop was just getting warmed up.

Dr. Koop and I were destined to be personal friends and professional colleagues notwithstanding the gap in years: we are both New Yorkers and both were born in Brooklyn. We both got our Medical Degrees at Cornell University Medical College in New York City. Dr. Koop and I first met in 1981 -- under rather historic and for him, certainly stressful, circumstances. After being nominated by President Reagan to be the 13th Surgeon General of the United State, he endured months of controversy and Senate Hearings. This resulted in great personal distress: his blood pressure rose, he could not sleep, he was feeling terrible and could not figure out what was wrong with him. He was the greatest surgeon in the world at the time but this was not a surgical problem.

At that time, years before I became Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, I was a young physician at the NIH. It was with a great deal of humility that I assumed the role of his personal physician. After an extensive evaluation, my final diagnosis was “Welcome to Washington Traumatic Stress Disorder.” Once we realized that it was nothing serious or chronic, he was off and running.

Following his eventual confirmation, his tenure as Surgeon General was truly historic. His contributions to the health of the Nation and the courageous manner in which he pursued this goal, from the war on smoking through the AIDS epidemic – with many projects in between – stands as testimony to the enormous impact that he has had on this Nation and the world.

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I'd like to relate a little-known but true story of the struggle to publish the original 1986 Surgeon General's Report on AIDS. At the time, Dr. Koop lived on the NIH campus across the lawn from my office as the Director of NIAID. He would drop by in the evenings on his way home. We would engage in lively discussions about what should go into the report. He was not primarily an AIDS physician, but he passionately wanted to get it right and he did. Then, in 1988, he was charged by a mandate from Congress to craft an Information Brochure on AIDS that was to be sent to all 107 million households in the United States. Some of our government leaders at the time thought they could frustrate him by “clearing” the brochure, but



without allocating funds to distribute it. What they did not know was that Dr. Koop and I were already close friends and that he was resourceful. Dr. Koop had no real budget to speak of. I, as the Director of a National Institute, had a hefty budget. It was a simple matter to work out an interagency transfer of the necessary funds – and out into the mail went the brochure.

Now, I'd like to relate another personal story from the time after he retired as Surgeon General. I will never forget the day that we were both in NYC at a Cornell University Alumni function. We stole off in a rented limo and visited the inner-city Brooklyn neighborhoods where we were born and raised. We topped it off with a few hot dogs at Nathan's in Coney Island. As we all know, Dr. Koop is one of the most recognizable people in the world. I will never forget the expression on the peoples' faces in the street in front of Nathan's as they recognized his famous Captain Ahab beard. Their jaws dropped before they began asking for his autograph.

I have given the introductory remarks at several ceremonies at which Dr. Koop received major awards. There is one statement that I have used in many of these talks that I will use again today as it fits him most appropriately. When people hear that I am a close friend of his and that we are confidantes, they often ask me what it was like to know this "very unpredictable individual". I respond very confidently that, in fact, contrary to their impressions, he is one of the most predictable people I have ever met: All *they* had to do was to be insightful enough to figure out what the correct approach to a problem should be under unusually trying circumstances. Then it would become clear that Chick Koop was the most predictable person in the world because he always seemed to do what was the most correct, honorable, and appropriate thing for the health of the Nation and the world. He is still doing it. This is his legacy and it is something for which he should be truly proud.

It has been wonderful to have known him over these past three decades. I am humbled and honored to have been chosen to present him with the *C. Everett Koop HIV/AIDS Health Leadership Award* for all the work he has done in the fight against HIV/AIDS. This award represents the admiration of a thankful global community.