

# My 1987 White House Interview on HIV, With Jim Warner, Senior Policy Analyst

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by Jon Rappoport, No More Fake News  
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When I interviewed President Reagan's policy analyst, Jim Warner, in 1987, there was something I didn't know: HIV had never been isolated. I did know the virus wasn't the cause of what was being called AIDS.

Senior White House policy analyst Jim Warner first came to public attention in a November 1987 article in the *New York Native*. In the story, "*The White House Calls the Native About Aids*," publisher Chuck Ortleb wrote: "Warner told me that the White House could be seen as divided into two groups on the issue of AIDS. One group, which he said is in the minority, wants to adopt an 'Auschwitz model' by quarantining all those infected with 'the virus.' 'The other group,' [Warner] said, 'is incompetent.'"

Warner told me he wasn't suggesting there was a White House group which was favoring "an Auschwitz model," but that some high-risk groups might think that was so. My following interview ran in the *LA Weekly* on December 18, 1987.

WEEKLY: Has anyone at the White House spoken to you about the *Native* article and what you said in it?

WARNER: I don't think anyone here knows there was an article

in that paper. The government really hasn't fulfilled its role in providing good information [on AIDS]. We just may not know enough. With AIDS, we're dealing with a syndrome, not a disease. We may see a patient who has a genetic defect that's causing his immune deficiency [instead of HIV being the causative agent]. I'm not satisfied we know all we think we do, by any means.

WEEKLY: Is your research on AIDS part of your policy work? Do you make recommendations based on what you find out? Or is it just that you're absorbed in discovering what's going on with AIDS?

WARNER: More of the latter than the former. I was asked to look into an Atlantic magazine article about insects and AIDS, and that's how it started. I decided I wanted to put together a set of questions concerning the HIV virus, so that the answers would suggest its role in AIDS. I would then draft a paper and give it to the people who asked me to look into the subject.

WEEKLY: Do people at the White House get a chance to talk to scientists over at the National Institutes of Health [NIH]? I mean really talk with them, find out what they're doing, how they're thinking?

WARNER: There is not much communication [between people at the White House and the scientists at NIH]. I'm probably the only person here who has much interest in it. This year I determined that the [White House] working group on AIDS wasn't adequate.

WEEKLY: Several university scientists I've spoken with have – off the record – criticized what they call “HIV dogma.” They feel if they speak out against the rush to judgment for HIV as the cause of AIDS they may lose money. Grants begin with the assumption that HIV has been proven as the agent of the disease.

WARNER: I'm of a mind that if no other lessons should be required of any university science curriculum, there should be a good survey course in philosophy and a grounding in logic. I'm appalled at the conceit and arrogance [of certain scientists].

WEEKLY: There has never been a performance-evaluation on the results of the NIH. NIH has balked at the idea of evaluating the worth of all their medical research over the last 20 years.

WARNER: That's a very good idea. I'm going to see what I can do about that.

WEEKLY: The Native article mentioned that you spoke with Dr. Lo, an Army researcher on AIDS. He has his own theory about the disease, that it's caused by a different virus. According to the Native, you had a problem getting through to him. Did they really tell you you'd have to get an okay from the Surgeon General just to talk to Lo?

WARNER: Yes. You know, although it is an honor to work at the White House, I'm not impressed that being here makes me special. But I pulled rank, and they put me through to Dr. Lo.

WEEKLY: Suppose proof emerged that HIV is not the AIDS virus. How difficult would it be to alter the course of research?

WARNER: It's very difficult to change people's minds. It's not impossible, but there is a head of steam built up.

WEEKLY: What do you do if a government agency, as a whole, has been derelict?

WARNER: It may end up as a brawl. I'd sort of like to finesse that, though, I'd like to avoid a public brawl. It eats up time. It's difficult when scientists are not open to discussing scientific issues.

WEEKLY: Robert Gallo, Max Essex, people like that, were the

field commanders on the NIH war on cancer in the 70's. They lost that war. So why are they in charge of AIDS research now? It seems odd that we don't have other people running the show.

WARNER: If ever I've been tempted to believe in socialism, science has disabused me of that. These guys [at NIH] assume that it's their show. They just assume it.

WEEKLY: Peter Duesberg, a distinguished molecular biologist at Berkeley, has said that HIV does not cause AIDS. Have you asked people at NIH what they think, specifically, of his arguments?

WARNER: Yes. I've been told that Peter Duesberg's refutation of HIV has been discounted by the scientific community. I was given no explanation as to why. I was very offended. No evidence was presented to me. Just that Duesberg had been 'discounted.' That's absurd. It's not a scientific response to dismiss Duesberg as a crank.

WEEKLY: The definition of AIDS has become so broad it's even stretching the idea of what a syndrome is, never mind a singular disease.

WARNER: A syndrome is a means of trying to understand how symptoms could be linked together. But if you do this in an atmosphere of hysteria, there is no limit to what you can attribute to a syndrome.

WEEKLY: The definition of AIDS in Africa is now becoming synonymous with starvation. They're saying the three major symptoms are chronic diarrhea, fever, and wasting-away. Weight-loss. It certainly makes a perfect smokescreen for the aspect of hunger which is political – just call it AIDS.

WARNER: I had not considered that. There is a program to make Africa self-sufficient by the year 2000. This could certainly hinder that activity. You know, I was a prisoner of war in Vietnam. I experienced weight-loss of eighty pounds. And when

I came home, I was suffering from a form of dysentery that you could call opportunistic. A number of us were. We didn't have AIDS.

—end of interview—

In November of 1987, I found out that the journal *Bio/Technology* was going to hold a roundtable workshop in which HIV would be addressed. Peter Duesberg and about a dozen other researchers would attend. The purpose of the roundtable would be to formulate experiments which, once and for all, would show HIV's role or non-role in AIDS.

I told Jim Warner about the proposed roundtable, and suggested he contact the magazine and sit in on the sessions. He did call, and to everyone's surprise, suggested that the roundtable be held in his office at the White House.

For the next month, it was on again, off again. There were obviously pressures within the White House against sanctioning such a meeting. About a month before the scheduled January 19th date, stories about it began appearing in several newspapers.

For a brief time, it looked like the White House's Office of Policy Development was not going to host it, but the Office of Science and Technology Policy was. Then the whole thing fell apart.

The *New York Post*, on January 7th, 1988, ran a story on Duesberg. The next day, the paper did a follow-up, headlined: *U.S. AXES DEBATE ON TRUE CAUSE OF AIDS*. After indicating that the White House meeting was canceled, medicine-science editor, Joe Nicholson, relayed a surprising quote from Gary Bauer, head of Reagan's Office of Policy Development, and Jim Warner's boss: "People like Dr. Duesberg need to continue to have access to research funds so that if we are heading in the wrong direction, that can be proved."

Bauer then said he didn't want the White House to sponsor the meeting because it would impart a political tone to a scientific event.

"I hope they have the debate elsewhere," he said. "I've sort of bristled at the finality with which some have made statements about AIDS and how it is transmitted. When findings run counter to the accepted wisdom, there is a tendency to muzzle or ignore rather than have an open debate."

The proposed debate never took place.

Given what Jim Warner told me in our 1987 interview, I'm sure, if he were still working for the government in 2021, he would have some choice comments about an NIH scientist who was a major player in the AIDS scene in 1987, and is still hogging the spotlight these days:

Anthony Fauci.

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