For Immediate Release

President Bill Clinton to Deliver Keynote Address at National AIDS Memorial for World AIDS Day Commemoration

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (November 13, 2017) – The National AIDS Memorial announced today that President Bill Clinton will deliver its keynote address during World AIDS Day ceremonies on Friday, December 1st, culminating a year of events marking more than 25 years since the memorial was created to honor those lost to the AIDS epidemic.

The first diagnosis of AIDS in the United States was reported in 1981. In San Francisco, when few others were taking notice, a small group of dedicated individuals responded to AIDS and from this effort, the San Francisco model of care and treatment of AIDS was born. Ten years later, at the height of the epidemic, another group of individuals created a place where people seeking healing could gather to express their collective grief through a living memorial, commonly referred to at the time as San Francisco’s AIDS Memorial Grove.

The pain the nation felt from the AIDS epidemic is why in 1996, President Clinton signed legislation spearheaded by Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi that forever designated this precious space as this country’s sole federally-designated National AIDS Memorial. The leadership and actions of President Clinton helped ensure that the nation and world would never forget the loved ones lost and was an important way to honor their legacy by caring for the sick and committing to solve the AIDS crisis.

“At a time when many national leaders paid little attention to the AIDS epidemic, President Bill Clinton courageously brought the issue to the forefront and through his compassion and leadership created a national memorial to forever honor the lives lost to AIDS,” said John Cunningham, executive director of the National AIDS Memorial. “We are so proud to have President Clinton be such an important part of our World AIDS Day commemoration and honor his global commitment to provide care and help find a cure for this devastating disease.”

This years’ World AIDS Day commemoration events on November 30th and December 1st at the National AIDS Memorial are built around the theme “Bending the Arc Toward Justice,” honoring people who have made a difference in the fight against AIDS and celebrating the next generation of leaders who will help ensure the story of AIDS is never forgotten.

In addition to President Clinton’s keynote address on World AIDS Day, David McMurry, retired Global Public Health Manager at Chevron, who led their world-wide AIDS programs and services for people in need, will receive the Humanitarian Leadership Award. Ruth Coker Burks, also known as the “Cemetery Angel” will receive the Thom Weyand Unsung Hero Award for her work in the darkest days of the epidemic in Arkansas, where she cared for hundreds of young gay men abandoned by their families. Underscoring the next generation of leaders in the AIDS movement, awardees of the 2017 Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship will be announced and will share their personal stories in the fight against AIDS.
On the eve of World AIDS Day much of the memorial’s ten acres will be beautifully illuminated for “Light in the Grove,” an event honoring those who have died while also celebrating the spirit of light and life. Guests will experience a candlelight reflection at the Circle of Friends and the evening includes special musical and choreographed artistic performances. Former California State Senator Mark Leno will receive the “Lifetime of Commitment” award for his decades of unwavering philanthropy, activism and leadership in support of HIV/AIDS, LGBT communities and civil liberties.

“One of the greatest lessons of the AIDS epidemic is that when one segment of society is discriminated against it affects the society as a whole,” said Mike Shriver, National AIDS Memorial Board Chair. “Out of injustice during the AIDS crisis rose action by citizens to tell their stories in pursuit of justice and equality.”

The presenting sponsor for the National AIDS Memorial World AIDS Day commemoration is Quest Diagnostics, a leading provider of diagnostics information services dedicated to advancing disease management for the HIV community and raising the standards of care in HIV diagnostics and beyond.

For more information about World AIDS Day commemoration events, including ticketing and entry, sponsorship opportunities, and the mission and programs of the National AIDS Memorial, visit www.aidsmemorial.org.

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About the National AIDS Memorial: The National AIDS Memorial is a dedicated space in the national landscape where millions of Americans touched directly or indirectly by AIDS can gather to heal, hope, and remember. The National AIDS Memorial, known as “the Grove”, was created twenty-five years ago in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic as a place where those impacted by AIDS could both grieve and begin the process of healing. In 1996, legislation sponsored by U.S. Representative Nancy Pelosi was signed into law by President Clinton that elevated “the Grove” as this nation's sole federally-designated National AIDS Memorial. Today, nearly 40,000 individuals from around the world have contributed 200,000 volunteer hours to support the National AIDS Memorial and its mission to provide, in perpetuity, a place of remembrance so that the lives of people who died from AIDS are not forgotten and the story is known by future generations. Follow on Facebook @NationalAIDSMemorial and @AIDS_Memorial on Twitter.

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