

Donald Trump Holds \$8.8 Billion In Global Health Aid Hostage, Calls It “Protecting Life”

By Christina Cauterucci



An AIDS Healthcare Foundation-Kenya worker distributes condoms in the streets of Nairobi in 2014.

Simon Maina/AFP/Getty Images

The Trump administration launched an unprecedented assault on global health on Monday, when State Department officials announced the details of the president’s **expanded version of the so-called “global gag rule.”** Other Republican presidents have previously instated the rule, also called the Mexico City Policy, which blocks U.S. funding from foreign organizations that provide abortion care, information about abortions, or advocate for abortion legalization.



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But previous iterations of the rule have only applied to the roughly \$600 million the U.S. sets aside for family-planning assistance. Donald Trump’s version will apply to all global health aid—about \$8.8 billion. Now, all overseas nonprofits must accept as a condition of any U.S. assistance that they cannot so much as tell a woman that abortion is a legal option.

According to the State Department, the expanded gag rule will apply to funds earmarked for HIV/AIDS prevention, malaria treatment, maternal health programs, Zika response, and child health programs in addition to funds for reproductive health and family planning programs. Trump has renamed the policy “Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance,” or PLGHA, the sound you’ll make when you consider the cruelty written into its provisions. The U.S. currently gives health aid to

organizations that experts at each funding agency have deemed the most capable and effective actors in global health. Some of those organizations, like Marie Stopes International and the International Planned Parenthood Federation, provide abortion care in addition to contraceptive services and other reproductive health care. Others don’t perform abortions but do give referrals or advocate for legal abortion, as they would for any policy that empowers women, communities, and economies. Under Trump’s floundering, incompetent administration, USAID, the State Department, and the Department of Defense will have to find new avenues for millions of dollars for which **IPPF** and **Marie Stopes**, among other organizations, will no longer be eligible.

The U.S. is the largest government provider of global health aid in the world; in 2006, it delivered more than one-third of all donor support for the whole planet's contraceptive supplies. After George W. Bush reinstated the global gag rule in 2001, NGOs in countries like Kenya and Ghana **were forced to slash contraceptive distribution programs** that served the neediest rural communities. Sixteen developing countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia lost access to their entire USAID-funded supply stream of contraceptives because it went through IPPF, which had well-established distribution networks all over those countries. Millions of women went without contraception they wanted and, in many cases, had already been using. Rates of unintended pregnancy rose in some of the world's poorest populations. **So did abortion rates**, as they usually do when women have no way to prevent pregnancy.

After losing their millions of dollars in USAID-funded contraceptives, four of those 16 countries ended up getting access to USAID-funded condoms—a less effective contraceptive than other more popular options, but better than nothing—through an HIV/AIDS prevention program Bush had specifically exempted from the gag rule. Under Trump's rule, countries like these won't get any contraceptives at all.

Effective health-care providers recognize that people are not one-issue organisms: HIV prevention affects nutrition, nutrition affects child health, child health affects family planning, family planning affects Zika prevention, and so on. It's close to impossible to disentangle reproductive health care and family planning work from the other vital services patients need. This is a good thing for patients, who are more likely these days to get care from organizations that serve a wider variety of their needs. But, perversely, this better approach to health care will amplify the damage the global gag rule can wreak. If a health clinic closes because the U.S. pulls funding due to its reproductive health work, people who depended on that clinic for all kinds of services will have nowhere to go. That's "protecting life" under Donald J. Trump.

Snowbeat

SLATE'S CULTURE BLOG

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Why Starz Was the Perfect Home for *American Gods*' Groundbreaking Gay Sex Scene

By Marissa Martinelli



Omad Abtahi and Mousa Kraish in *American Gods*' "Head Full of Snow."

Starz

American Gods, Starz's **divine adaptation of the 2001 novel by Neil Gaiman**, has been pushing boundaries since its first episode, which featured bodies being torn to shreds and a fertility goddess who consumes lovers with her vagina. But even by the show's already-elevated standards, Sunday's third episode, "Head Full of Snow," was one that viewers will not soon forget. In an interlude taken directly from the book, a lonely Omani salesman, Salim (Omid Abtahi), meets a New York cab driver who also happens to be a Jinn (Mousa Kraish), a fiery-eyed mythological figure from Middle Eastern and Islamic folklore. The two displaced souls bond over their shared displacement and memories of home, tentatively touching hands in the taxi, and then they head back to Salim's hotel room to have some of the hottest sex ever seen on television. (Quite literally, since one of them ejaculates like a flamethrower.)

It would have been a simple matter to cut the scene from the show, since the book's many interludes, while fascinating, are not essential to its plot. Instead, *American Gods* went all in, with a four-minute full-frontal encounter that is one of the most graphic gay sex scenes ever seen on mainstream television, one that was even more remarkable for taking place between two Muslim men. "Just seeing two Middle Eastern men represented in that way, with humor and love and joy," said Kraish at a panel co-hosted by GLAAD, "it's taken me 11 years to get to that." Showrunner Bryan Fuller explained that in addition to taking great technical pains to make the scene as physically accurate as possible—including **reshoots** to help the straight actors get the sexual positions right—the creators also worked toward emotional accuracy. "We felt like for Salim, as a man coming from a country that throws you off the top of buildings if you're gay, a blow job in an alley is probably his only sexual experience," he told *Vulture*. "We felt like the Jinn, in this romantic gesture, wanted to give him a more intimate sexual experience."

A scene like this might seem more obviously suited to a streaming service like Netflix, where **queer storylines**—and, in particular, **sex**—have flourished, but it's no coincidence that this game-changer made its debut on Starz. Where HBO and other premium cable networks have been accused of shunting LGBTQ representation into niche shows—when they aren't **cancelling them** altogether—Starz's original programming has made key strides in sexual diversity over the past several years. *Survivor's Remorse* and *Power*, for instance, have both featured queer characters of color, but that sexual diversity also extends to genres where we don't always expect queer stories to be told. *Black Sails*, Starz's prequel to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, boasted almost as many bisexual characters in its main lineup as not, and same-sex relationships acted as major drivers of the plot—the show's most prominent character is an outlaw who wages an entire war on civilized society to avenge his male lover, in a rare, nuanced depiction of male bisexuality that is even rarer for being part of an action-driven period piece. (That's right: Until recently, one of the queerest shows on television was an 18th-century pirate epic produced by Michael Bay.) While *Black Sails* concluded in April, its four-season run demonstrates Starz's history of looking beyond a straight male audience, even in genres whose audiences might be assumed to skew that way. ~~Let's not forget that Starz was once home to gladiator saga *Spartacus*, which openly embraced the queer male gaze and that featured one of television's first gay action heroes.~~

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