

November 30, 2006

SCHAKOWSKY COMMEMORATES WORLD AIDS DAY IN HAITI

"US MUST RECOMMIT TO FIGHT CRISIS AT HOME AND ACROSS THE GLOBE"

JACKMEL, HAITI-U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today issued a statement to commemorate World AIDS Day 2006 and the 25th anniversary of the global AIDS epidemic, which will be observed on Friday, December 1. □ □

Schakowsky is traveling this week in Haiti, the country hardest hit by AIDS in the Western hemisphere. Schakowsky, whose trip is focusing on public health, democracy and child welfare issues in Haiti, said, "We must challenge ourselves to move beyond complacency and continue to push to find accessible and affordable treatments, effective prevention approaches and a cure."

Schakowsky's complete statement follows.

"This year marks the 25th anniversary of the global AIDS epidemic. On December 1, World AIDS Day, I hope we will all take time to celebrate our successes, support those living with this disease, and honor those who have been lost to us by remaining vigilant in the fight against HIV/AIDS. We have made progress but much, much more remains to be done. We must challenge ourselves to move beyond complacency and continue the push to find accessible and affordable treatments, effective prevention approaches, and a cure.

"Over the 25 years of the epidemic, AIDS has changed from an automatic "death sentence" to a potentially manageable, chronic condition for many persons in the United States. These are accomplishments for which we should be proud. The Ryan White CARE Act has been instrumental not only in lengthening lives but in improving quality of life and letting many Americans be productive members of our community. We must reauthorize the CARE Act to continue that record of success. In the U.S., over one million persons are living with HIV/AIDS, and there are approximately 40,000 new cases of HIV infection each year. Approximately one in four persons with HIV is undiagnosed and unaware of their infection. We cannot afford to be complacent.

"World AIDS Day is a day to recommit ourselves not just to solving this crisis at home but to demonstrating leadership in fighting the epidemic across the globe. Worldwide, over 30 million people are living with HIV/AIDS and over 25 million people have died from it. Globally, AIDS represents the leading cause of death among individuals aged 15 - 59. Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced the greatest rates of HIV/AIDS, with several countries in this region approaching one-quarter to one-third of the population living with HIV or AIDS. Thanks to initiatives such as the World Health Organization's 3 by 5 program, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, access to medication in the region has increased from virtually zero in 2002 to over 800,000 persons in 2005. Again, though, much remains to be accomplished.

"This week, I am visiting Haiti, the country hardest hit by HIV/AIDS in the Western hemisphere. Haiti has the highest prevalence of HIV infection in all of Latin America and the Caribbean. In this nation, AIDS is the leading cause of death among women and the disease has killed over 200,000 children. Anti-viral therapy has been received by only 16% of those persons who need it. The majority of these treatments are provided through PEPFAR and the Global Fund.

"World AIDS Day is also a day of hope. In Haiti and Rwanda, Paul Farmer and Partners in Health are demonstrating that we can make significant inroads in the fight against AIDS, even in poor countries. Scientific advancements supported by federal initiatives and private assistance have contributed to the development of an arsenal of 25 FDA approved anti-viral medications, with other promising drugs under development. Improved preventive techniques, including microbicides to allow women - a growing proportion of the infected population - are possible in the near-term. The bipartisan Microbicide Development Act, which I have sponsored along with Rep. Chris Shays, will help turn that potential into reality.

"World AIDS Day provides us the opportunity to reflect upon our progress but, more importantly, to push for action here and abroad." □ □