

DECEMBER 1, 2001

SCHAKOWSKY KEYNOTES WORLD AIDS DAY FORUM

EVANSTON, IL - On World AIDS Day, U.S Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) was the keynote speaker during an AIDS in Africa forum sponsored by the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation. Africa is the home to 25 million people suffering from AIDS, and each day, 5,000 Africans die from AIDS.□ □

Schakowsky is working with her colleagues in Congress to combat the worldwide HIV/AIDS crisis; to promote access to affordable drugs; and to ensure that U.S. monetary and trade policies reflect a commitment to helping Sub Saharan African nations and other countries who are faced with this pandemic that is killing millions of people each year.

Below is Schakowsky's speech:

I want to thank Rabbi Rosen for his support and to pay special thanks and tribute to Debbie Wolen and others who helped to put together this timely and important event.□ I also want to thank the other speakers here with us tonight; they have demonstrated incredible leadership and commitment on this issue.□ You are all to be commended for your efforts.□ □

Today is World AIDS day, and communities across the country and around the world are holding events to raise awareness and create action to combat the HIV/AIDS crisis.□ It is the work and commitment of individuals and organizations like those of you here tonight that is going to be critical if we are to make the necessary progress on this issue in the years to come

Since September 11 and the anthrax crisis that followed shortly after, we have all been concerned and uneasy, and understandably so.□ The Congress has moved quickly over the last several weeks to allocate billions of dollars to protect this country from threats, to aid recovery efforts, and to rebuild.□ The damage caused on September 11 required such a response.□ □

With AIDS, in this nation alone, we face equally daunting numbers in terms of the threat to human life.□ Yet we have spent only a paltry amount to combat and prevent it.□ In the long-term, AIDS could prove a greater threat to our security and to that of the international community, and it is disappointing to me that the United States has yet to step forward with an appropriate response to this crisis.□ Our mission here today and everyday is to make that happen.

We have all heard some of the staggering statistics about AIDS. However, I believe that at least some of them need to be repeated time and again until necessary results are

achieved.

- Since the HIV-AIDS pandemic began, it has claimed well over 20 million lives.
- Over 17 million men, women and children have died due to AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa alone.
- Over 40 million people are infected with the HIV virus today. Over 25 million of them live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- By 2010, approximately 40 million children worldwide will have lost one or both of their parents to HIV-AIDS.
- Each day AIDS kills more than 7000 people in sub-Saharan Africa, and the pandemic continues to escalate in the Caribbean, Asia, and Russia. This human catastrophe is unlike anything the world has known for over half a millennium.

Since September 11, many of us have taken a closer look at our priorities. In Washington we are looking at the federal budget with a new perspective. Some, who traditionally oppose foreign aid and spending on AIDS prevention and treatment programs, have asserted that we need to focus our resources on combating immediate threats. They suggest that aggressive spending to battle AIDS is somehow beyond the purview of our new reality. I could not disagree more.

Despite the new challenges to our national security in the wake of September 11, this crisis must not be neglected. The consequences of inaction or an inadequate response will be too serious. AIDS is now projected to leave over 100 million people infected by the year 2007.

This is a pandemic that has the potential of eclipsing all plagues of the past, all wars, can destabilize nations and continents and the world. The time is now to attack this pandemic with all of the resources we have available.

I read an Op-ed in the *Washington Post* this week that was written by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. He said:

"Every day more than 8,000 people die of AIDS. Every hour almost 600 people become infected. Every minute a child dies of the virus. Just as life - and death -- goes on after Sept. 11, so must we continue our fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Before the

terrorist attacks two months ago, tremendous momentum had been achieved in that fight. To lose it now would be to compound one tragedy with another."

Since I was elected to Congress there has been some progress. There is an increased level of awareness both in Washington and throughout the country, there is a higher level of bipartisan concern about HIV/AIDS, and the U.S. commitment in terms of dollars delegated to combating AIDS is more than it has ever been. That being said, there is much more work to be done.

The Global AIDS and Health Trust Fund contains roughly \$1.5 billion. This amount has been raised through government, corporate, and private donations but comes nowhere near the level it should.

The fact that techniques which prevent the spread of HIV infection exist, and that drugs exist that can substantially reduce the rate of mother-to-child transmission and prolong the lives of people who are infected, makes it incumbent on us to invest the resources necessary to distribute those treatments.

It is estimated that at least \$15 billion are needed to provide a minimum package of prevention, care, infrastructure development and capacity building to combat HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa each year alone. We are a long way from that goal, and it is going to take a lot of work and political pressure from people like you before we get there.

U.S. foreign aid stands at less than one percent of our annual federal budget. This year we will spend roughly \$15 billion in total aid to other nations worldwide.

Total U.S. spending to battle AIDS in Africa in 2001 totaled just \$229 million. This year, the United States also made a founding contribution of \$200 million to the Global AIDS and Health fund. Additional funding would follow, President Bush said, "as we learn where our support can be most effective."

The President also said that, "we believe the fund must respect intellectual property rights, as an incentive for vital research and development." But that should not be an escape clause for drug companies to put their profits ahead of human health and life. They've done so in the past, they're doing it today, and unless the United States Congress shows real leadership, the might drug company interests will continue to prevail as the number of people infected with HIV/AIDS and in need of treatment exponentially grows.

In Fiscal Year 2002, the House of Representatives' Foreign Aid bill calls for \$474 million for HIV/AIDS programs, and funding to increase child survival.

Today some 95% of people with HIV/AIDS live in economically disadvantaged countries and do not have access to treatment for opportunistic infections or access to anti-retroviral drugs. Yet, the United States has not taken a leadership role in increasing access to those life-saving drugs.

In fact, the current and former Administrations played the shameful role of pharmaceutical industry apologist. We stood in the way of countries like South Africa, Thailand, and Brazil that have taken bold steps to make AIDS drugs more accessible.

I consider one of my most critical accomplishments since coming to Congress is successfully persuading the Clinton Administration to reverse course. President Clinton issued an Executive Order changing U.S. policy and prohibiting the U.S. from challenging efforts of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to make AIDS drugs more accessible and affordable.

I was pleased to see some positive language on this subject come out of the recent WTO negotiations in Doha, Qatar. Under the leadership of the Africa Group, a bloc of more than 80 countries representing a majority of WTO Member States forced concessions from rich countries on the issue of public health and patent rights, despite fierce pressure from the U.S., E.U., and others.

Such concessions include the statement that "Each Member has the right to grant compulsory licenses and the freedom to determine the grounds upon which such licenses are granted." This statement permits a country to produce and import generic versions of drugs patented in the country issuing the license, without facing retaliatory action from other WTO members. Those discussions fortunately proved worthwhile. I will closely monitor the effect of that statement.

Much discussion but, even more, action needs to occur in the coming years if we are serious about combating the spread of HIV-AIDS and if we want to aggressively work to provide relief to those who are already suffering from this terrible disease.

I am aware that each of you is going to be asked to support various efforts this evening from donating money to various organizations to writing a letter to a friend or your elected official. Those are all important things to do.

The campaign to secure \$1 billion in emergency funding for AIDS is the number one policy priority right now. As you all know there are House and Senate letters urging President Bush to request those funds from the Congress. I am an original signatory of the House letter. I noticed that one of our Illinois Senators-Senator Fitzgerald-has not yet signed the Senate letter. You are doing the right thing in calling on him to do so immediately.

In Congress, I am supporting a number of legislative measures that will be important in the fight against AIDS.

- **HR 1567, This is a bill which calls for multilateral debt cancellation for countries that are heavily affected by HIV/AIDS.**

- **H.R. 2069, the Global Access to HIV/AIDS Prevention, Awareness, Education, and**

Treatment Act of 2001. A bipartisan bill provides an additional \$560 million, a doubling of the United States' bilateral HIV/AIDS programs; it calls for \$750 million for the U.S. annual contribution to a global AIDS fund, and it creates \$50 million for an AIDS drug procurement program. While the funding in this bill is still not as high as many of us would like to see it, it would be a great start and I am confident we will see action on this measure before the Congressional recess.

- H.R. 933, the HIV/AIDS Medicines for Poor Countries Act, which would make it illegal for the United States Government to use the TRIPS agreement, the World Trade Organization agreement, to challenge another country's efforts to make HIV/AIDS drugs available at lower prices. The bill would also prohibit any agency of the U.S. Government from using Federal funds to seek to revoke any law or policy of a developing country that promotes access to HIV/AIDS medicines. Finally, the bill would require the U.S. to urge the World Trade Organization to exempt developing countries from the application of provisions of the TRIPS agreement that restrict their ability to make HIV/AIDS medicines available to their populations at affordable prices.

- H.R. 1185, the Global Access to HIV/AIDS Medicines Act of 2001. To prohibit through negotiation or otherwise the revocation or revision of any intellectual property or competition law or policy of a developing country, including any sub-Saharan African country, that regulates HIV/AIDS pharmaceuticals or medical technologies. This bill codifies a Clinton Administration Executive Order on HIV/AIDS pharmaceuticals in Sub-Saharan Africa and expands it to make it global.

These are just a few of the measures I will be pushing over the next year. Congressional efforts alone will not be enough.

This is a time in history that requires the people of the world to sit down and together develop the strategies that will end this threat.

I discussed the progress that has been made in developing products to treat HIV and AIDS, and many of those products were developed with taxpayer funding. Those publicly financed products should be accessible and affordable to consumers both in the United States and in other countries. They should not be freebees for the pharmaceutical industry to boost profits.

A recent *Washington Post* editorial stated, "*The (Bush) administration should lead an international effort to clarify poor countries' right to fight emergencies with generic drugs.*"

President Bush should go a step further and use existing authority to give the World

Health Organization the right to use HIV/AIDS patents where the United States Government has rights to those inventions.

I mentioned earlier some of the arguments we hear about how the U.S. cannot afford to commit the funding necessary to put a stop to the AIDS pandemic. Some here in this country somehow think we are insulated from this crisis. We are not. This disease knows no borders and we cannot afford to attack it with anything less than we are capable.

In 1999, I had the honor to join Vice President Gore at the United Nations when he convened the first ever session of the Security Council on a health issue, AIDS. For the first time at that session, AIDS was labeled as a global security threat. I was so proud at that time that the United States and the United Nations were issuing a wake up call to the planet on AIDS. However, while I was honored to be there with the Vice President, Kofi Annan, and dignitaries from all over the world, I left feeling even more unsettled than before. I realized that humankind was losing the battle against AIDS and that unless a major shift was to occur, we would never win.

I want to leave you all with that message. Because it is important that you are all here to listen and to learn tonight. But you I hope that you leave here feeling more unsettled and concerned than you were before. Because if we are going to have a fighting chance in this monumental struggle, what is most needed is action from.