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SCHAKOWSKY TO ADDRESS AIDS IN THE HEARTLAND CONFERENCE IN CHICAGO & TO EMPHASIZE ROLE OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN COMBATING HIV/AIDS IN THE MIDWEST

JUNE 5 MARKS THE 20TH YEAR OF THE FIRST FIVE AIDS CASES REPORTED TO THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) is one of the featured panelists at a three day conference in Chicago on the AIDS crisis in the Midwest. The AIDS in the Heartland conference will begin on Wednesday, May 30, and Schakowsky is scheduled to participate on a federal panel with other elected officials on Friday, June 1.

The AIDS in the Heartland conference is designed to focus nationwide attention on HIV/AIDS in the Midwest and to generate increased resources to address the epidemic in the region. June 5 marks the 20th year of the first five reported cases to the Centers for Disease Control of what later became known as AIDS.

"The toll HIV/AIDS has had on human life has been staggering. Improved drug therapies have lulled the public into a false sense of security about the disease. People no longer think AIDS is an emergency. Yet, more people are infected with HIV/AIDS today than at any time in our history," Schakowsky said.

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More than 28,000 people are living with HIV/AIDS in Illinois, and Chicago ranks sixth amongst U.S. cities in its number of diagnosed AIDS cases. Nationwide, more than 40,000 people are infected each year, with around 1,500 of them occurring in Illinois.

"Cities in the Midwest like Chicago are in dire need of federal support as they try to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic and provide medical, housing and other support for individuals living with the virus. I am joining with my Midwestern colleagues in Congress to express the critical need for increased funding for HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and support programs," said Schakowsky.□

"President Bush failed to add even one additional penny to the Ryan White CARE Act despite increasing needs and the skyrocketing costs of treatment. The CARE Act ensures that those living with HIV/AIDS have access to life-enhancing treatments, affordable housing, and employment opportunities.□ It is a program that works and deserves our continued support," added Schakowsky.

She concluded, "I urge President Bush to reconsider his ill advised public health policy and to instead support increasing funding for the CARE Act by \$307 million.□ It is a lifeline for millions living with AIDS.□ The President should also make it a top priority to

fully fund other critical programs including HIV prevention and education programs, substance abuse and mental health treatment programs, minority HIV/AIDS initiatives and affordable housing."

The AIDS in the Heartland conference will also feature the release of the second edition of the Chicago Department of Public Health's compelling book and companion photo documentary, *The Faces of AIDS: Personal Stories from the Heartland*. These stories of people living with HIV/AIDS offer poignant insight into what it's like living with the disease 20 years after it first emerged.