

JANUARY 29, 2001

SCHAKOWSKY WARNS PRESIDENT BUSH TO NOT REVERSE U.S. POLICY ON HIV/AIDS DRUGS TO AFRICA

BIPARTISAN GROUP SEEK MEETING WITH BUSH ASAP

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In a letter, U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) warned President Bush not to reverse a Clinton Executive Order that is helping African nations gain access to affordable HIV/AIDS drugs without violating U.S. trade policies. The Executive Order was issued on May 10, 2000 and titled "Access to HIV/AIDS Pharmaceuticals and Medical Technologies."

"Reversing this policy poses a grave threat to global security," Schakowsky warned. She attended the U.N. Security Council meeting where this crisis was designated a global security threat.

Schakowsky, Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) and a bipartisan group of members also called on the President to meet with them immediately to discuss this issue before taking any actions that will threaten the lives of millions of Africans and U.S. national security. More than 12 million people have died of AIDS in Sub Saharan Africa.

After Schakowsky and others criticized U.S. policies of putting politics and profits ahead of access to affordable HIV/AIDS drugs for nations like South Africa, President Clinton issued that Executive Order changing U.S. trade policies. However, Schakowsky believes that more must be done to ensure that developing countries are free to pursue access to affordable HIV/AIDS drugs and will continue to take a lead role on this issue.

In addition to Schakowsky and Lee, the letter was signed by Representatives, Waxman, Leach, Conyers, Bonoir, Sherrod Brown, Sanders, Nadler, Baldwin, Farr, Lampson, Jackson-Lee, Fank, Crowley, George Miller, Christian-Christensen, McDermott, Filner, Kildee, Berman, Carolyn Maloney, Delahunt, Honda, Harman, Payne, Cummings, Eddie Bernice Johnson, and Bishop.

January 26, 2001

*The Honorable George Walker Bush
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500*

Dear Mr. President:

We write to you today as members of Congress who have been deeply involved in finding ways to expand access to affordable HIV and AIDS drugs for the sub-Saharan Africa, to request a meeting. We worked hard to convince the previous administration to issue the May 10, 2000 Executive Order titled "Access to HIV/AIDS Pharmaceuticals and Medical Technologies." We are concerned because it has been reported in the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, Bloomberg News and elsewhere that you may rescind that Executive Order. We believe this would be a mistake, we urge you not to take such action, and request that you meet with us to discuss this issue.

The HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa not only presents a moral imperative for a U.S. role, but poses a serious threat to our security and that of the international community. Last year the United Nations Security Council designated the problem as a global security threat.

As you know, Africa bears the brunt of the HIV/AIDS crisis. In sub-Saharan Africa, between one-third and one-fifth of all children have already been orphaned by AIDS. Twelve million men, women, and children in Africa have already died of AIDS. Today in Africa, 5,500 people are buried daily because of AIDS and, according to UNAIDS, that number is expected to more than double in the next ten years. This disease will claim more lives than all the armed conflicts of the last century combined. But for most of the continent's population, life-saving drugs are not accessible due to exorbitant prices.

In the past, numerous African nations were dissuaded by the United States from taking steps to make some of these critical drugs more affordable. We believe that the Executive Order issued on May 10, 2000 was a step in the right direction and should be strengthened and not reversed. In the first days of your Administration you have made a commendable effort of reaching out to members of Congress on both sides of the aisle. We believe that this is an issue that warrants dialogue and, again, urge you to meet with us before taking any action that would restrict the efforts sub-Saharan African nations are taking to deal with the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to your response.