

April 23, 2003

Support HR 1298, the U.S. Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Act, without Amendment

ISSUE: HR 1298, sponsored by Reps. Hyde (R-IL), Lantos (D-CA), Lee (D-CA), Leach (R-IA) and Weldon (R-FL), recommends significantly higher spending to stop the global AIDS epidemic. We consider it an important step forward. The bill will likely be voted on by the full House during the first week of May. With the need so urgent and funds so scarce, we encourage you to call the Washington office of your Representative (ask for the staffer who handles foreign aid issues) and fax or e-mail a letter.

As we have noted before, despite President Bush's January announcement outlining an emergency plan to fight AIDS, it is now clear that funding will come incrementally, with only about 10% of the promised \$15 billion to be spent in 2004, even though Mr. Bush said AIDS was an emergency. At the same time, the President's proposal cuts the level of funding to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (an innovative and efficient new way of helping people fight the disease).

A few members of Congress are looking for ways to improve on the President's approach. We are trying to encourage and strengthen them while we still have time. We have until about September or October to influence what will eventually be the spending plan for AIDS programs for 2004.

As previously detailed (see our March 28 alert at <http://www.woafrica.org/AIDS53.htm>), our coalition's call is for \$3.5 billion in global AIDS spending, as well as deeper debt relief, beyond what the President has proposed. The groups call for \$1.7 billion of that to go to the Global Fund. More than 100 religious, humanitarian, and activist organizations from all over the world have signed a letter to that effect. (For the text of that letter, go to <http://www.woafrica.org/AIDS51.htm>)

President Bush has been putting pressure on Congress to adopt his approach (slow, underfunded programs). Conservative groups are asking their Members to vote down bills that don't prioritize abstinence and to oppose bills that provide more funding to the Global Fund. The result is that the most positive and forward-looking efforts are coming under severe attack.

Despite all the pressure, just two weeks ago the U.S. House International Relations Committee formally recommended a large increase in U.S. spending on global AIDS programs for fiscal year 2004 and subsequent years. By a vote of 37 to 8, the Republican-led Committee approved a bill that recommends spending \$3 billion on global AIDS programs in FY 2004, with up to \$1 billion of that for the Global Fund. A portion of the total (10%) was specified for programs to meet the needs of the millions of children orphaned by AIDS.

Because HR 1298 recommends a much higher level of AIDS spending than does President Bush's plan, the measure could run into serious difficulties despite its passage in committee. Some Members of Congress may seek to amend the bill when it reaches the House floor. They may seek to reduce the level of funding for the Global Fund. They may also try to amend it so it prioritizes abstinence programs, even though the bill maintains a thoughtful approach to

abstinence, faithfulness, and precautions. This bill is important because it sends a signal to the rest of the Congress about what should be done.

Since HR 1298 does not actually provide any funding, the fate of millions of people affected by AIDS will be up to Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees as well as House and Senate leadership. It's up to them to actually provide the level of resources recommended by the sponsors of this bill. It will also be up to Congress and the White House whether emergency spending bills for FY 2003 will provide desperately needed money to fight AIDS: the Global Fund needs an infusion of U.S. dollars by this summer to be able to consider funding the next round of proposals.

All of this is to say that (1) authorizing legislation like HR 1298 is especially important as it sets higher figures and raises critical perspectives on the global AIDS pandemic ,and (2) appropriating legislation to come later in the year will be another moment at which we will encourage your action.

Given security delays with regular mail, contact your Member of the House of Representatives at 202/225-3121, or by fax or by e-mail. You can access some fax and e-mail links by going to http://www.house.gov/house/MemberWWW_by_State.htm.

Write to Members of Congress at the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

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General Assembly: The 213th General Assembly (2001) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), out of profound concern for families, communities, and nations ravaged by the HIV/AIDS epidemic [among other things]:

- Directs the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to write a letter to the President of the United States, calling upon the United States government to allocate greater resources toward addressing the epidemic and poverty that fans it, as well as prevention and affordable treatment initiatives recommended according to the WHO Massive Effort, and to show flexibility regarding trade agreements and intellectual property rights so that life-saving drugs can be available to all affected populations.
- Requests the Presbyterian Washington Office and the Presbyterian UN Office to support advocacy efforts to address the Massive Effort Against the Diseases of Poverty, and the need to make affordable medication available to countries in the developing world. (*Minutes*, 2001, Part I, p. 336)