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**STATE OF THE RHETORIC:
YEARLY AIDS PROMISES RING HOLLOW AS EPIDEMIC ESCALATES**
*DESPITE FREQUENT MENTION OF HIV/AIDS IN RECENT STATE OF THE UNION SPEECHES,
EPIDEMIC WORSENS OVER SIX YEARS OF BUSH ADMINISTRATION*

New York, NY – HIV/AIDS advocates, anticipating that President Bush may once again make AIDS-related promises in this evening's State of the Union speech, noted persistent and growing gaps in prevention and treatment in this nation and around the world.

US EPIDEMIC: Prevention funds cut, African American most impacted, ½ of those in need of treatment cannot get steady supply:

240,000 people in the United States have become newly infected with HIV since Bush took office, with African-Americans representing half of the 40,000 new HIV infections each year.

"I'm sad to say that my president's talk on AIDS in these speeches does not translate into dollars, and certainly hasn't brought any decline in the number of new HIV infections," said Judith Dillard of CHAMP, an African American woman living with HIV in Fort Worth, TX. "His pledges to reduce infections aren't worth the paper his speechwriters print them on, as long as he keeps attacking reality-based HIV prevention, and as long as he keeps on paying religious programs to preach abstinence rather than funding public health programs that work. The man has cut our HIV prevention funds nearly every year of his Administration, so he's got a nerve saying he cares."

The CDC HIV prevention budget may receive a fourth consecutive year of funding cuts in 2007, even though former CDC officials estimate that an additional \$340 million annually is needed to achieve the Bush administration's goal of reducing the number of new HIV infections by half.

At the same time the administration has claimed they cannot afford to make the necessary investment in HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and care programs, Bush has consistently asked for more money for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in his budget requests to Congress. There is no evidence these programs work, and congressional investigations have discovered widespread medical inaccuracies in government-funded curricula and criticized the programs for promoting stigma against people with HIV.

HIV TESTING: Frequently mentioned, rarely funded, no substitute for comprehensive prevention:

In the 2006 State of the Union speech, Bush proposed a \$90 million initiative to fund targeted HIV testing among a few populations, including prisoners and drug users. The Administration did not make significant efforts to secure these funds, even in a Republican-controlled Congress, and the proposal has gone to the wayside.

Meanwhile, the new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendation of routine HIV testing in all healthcare settings would require an estimated \$900 million to implement. It has also been criticized by advocates, including those who stress that people who test positive would

face an overburdened care system and waiting lists, while people testing negative would likely have no access to effective prevention programs to help them stay HIV-free.

Activists also cite an Institute of Medicine (IOM) report estimating that half of all Americans diagnosed with HIV who need treatment cannot consistently access it, and question how care will be available to those newly testing positive.

“When Mr. Bush says he really wants to stop HIV in this country, I want him to know that investments in HIV testing will make little difference in truly ending the epidemic unless we fill the AIDS treatment gap that persists in this country. There’s an estimated \$200 million shortfall for the federal AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) this year, which could result in more widespread drug waiting lists if not funded, that will only grow as more people get diagnosed,” explained Lei Chou, CHAMP’s Director of Mobilization. “Those who will be newly diagnosed through expanded HIV testing efforts are less likely to have insurance, may not be sick enough to qualify for Medicaid, and are most likely to end up on already strained ADAP lists.”

GLOBAL TOLL: Infections unabated, treatment numbers flagging, long-term challenges:

Bush’s frequently praised Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) may be up for renewal in Congress this year, although his HIV prevention policies have created controversy for the program. Currently, one-half of all money used for preventing sexual transmission of HIV, the biggest source of new infections in Africa, is used to promote abstinence to the exclusion of evidence-based approaches. In Uganda, a “focus country” for PEPFAR, the number of new infections each year has doubled since PEPFAR funding been introduced.

“Bush has made global AIDS a centerpiece of his compassionate conservative agenda, but it’s neither compassionate to deny people accurate information nor conservative to waste taxpayer money on clearly ineffective programs,” said Julie Davids, CHAMP’s Executive Director.

PEPFAR’s goal of putting two million people on AIDS treatment may fail if the Democratic Congress does not approved the necessary funds to continue supporting those already on treatment, which President Bush says is \$1 billion for 2007. The initiative also faces longer-term problems due to weak health care systems that make it difficult to deliver medicines. To this end, over 400 organizations and dozens of leading academics are calling on the Bush administration to adopt a \$8 billion five-year initiative to train and support enough health care workers to ensure universal access to AIDS treatment by 2010.

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