

Commit to world AIDS fight

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David Bryden of the Global AIDS Alliance Fund traveled from Washington, D.C., to Iowa recently to bend the ears of presidential campaign staff. In working to ensure adequate funding for AIDS efforts around the world, activists "can get a hearing here," he said. "They wouldn't necessarily in Washington."

Iowa is the place to be - even when the issue is global health and specifically AIDS, which kills more than 3 million people each year.

On Tuesday, Bryden was preparing to meet with Mitt Romney's campaign staff. He said his local allies had already met with staff representing Gov. Bill Richardson, Sens. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama and former Sen. John Edwards - all who have signed a pledge to commit necessary resources to fight HIV/AIDS.

"AIDS should not be a partisan issue," Bryden said. "By signing the pledge, the Democrats have essentially committed to expand and carry forward what a Republican, President Bush, started." A pledge commits them in writing, which may be useful later when budget fights ensue, he said.

The next president must take global health threats seriously. Security for America isn't just about terrorists with bombs. Avian flu and tuberculosis and AIDS threaten life as well.

And there is also the matter of the United States' standing in the world. It's our responsibility to help impoverished countries prevent and treat deadly disease, build up health systems and care for children orphaned by AIDS. It's the right thing to do.

"You've got candidates talking about our moral responsibilities to Africa," Bryden said. "Let's make sure we have a humanitarian profile in the world."