



Highlights of the PEPFAR Reauthorization Debate in the House Foreign Affairs Committee *February 27, 2008*

The House Foreign Affairs Committee began its debate on legislation to reauthorize the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (H.R. 5501) by renaming the bill the *Tom Lantos and Henry J. Hyde United States Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Reauthorization Act of 2008*, in honor of Representatives Lantos and Hyde.

Berman in his opening remarks pointed out that this is a bipartisan compromise bill and that the new legislation is intended to move the US global AIDS program toward sustainability. He urged members to vote for the bill.

Ros-Lehtinen called the program the most successful US foreign assistance program in the last 25 years. She said it provides for balanced funding that ensures that abstinence and fidelity (AB) programs are included in prevention efforts, and maintains the prostitution pledge but does not prevent organizations receiving funds from working with sex workers. She urged her colleagues to vote for the bill and to resist efforts to derail it. She also pointed out that this issue is a personal one for her, since the Miami-Dade district she represents has a large population living with HIV/AIDS.

Payne spoke highly of the bill, but indicated that not enough progress is being made as only 28% of people who need treatment are receiving it and the number of pregnant women receiving PMTCT services is still low. He hopes the bill is passed before the G8 summit so that President Bush can use it to leverage other countries to step up their efforts to combat the epidemic.

Chris Smith also spoke highly of the bill. He commented that the concern voiced by some members that the program would support abortion had been addressed and should be addressed in the final legislation. He was pleased with the retention of the prostitution pledge and clarified that the pledge does not prevent people forced to engage in prostitution from receiving services from PEPFAR-funded organizations, and that he hoped these organizations could help these individuals escape prostitution. He would have preferred that the earmark for AB programs be retained, but feels that the bill includes language that provides for efforts to encourage behavior change, which he feels is vital to preventing HIV. He pointed out that condoms are an element of behavior change, though abstinence and fidelity are critical for prevention, and thinks balanced funding is a good approach.

Barbara Lee mentioned that she had wanted the bill to have language repealing the Mexico City rule. She said it is important that HIV/AIDS programs are linked with family planning, nutrition and food security, and efforts to address the special vulnerabilities of women and girls, and she is pleased that the bill does this and incorporates recommendations from people living with HIV/AIDS. She said she will work to make sure that the \$50 billion goal is met and that the full amount is appropriated.

Burton expressed concern that the agencies and people involved in implementing the US program on the ground have not been able to absorb the \$15 billion already appropriated, so he questioned whether they will be able to absorb \$50 billion and wanted to know how the money will be disseminated and absorbed. In response, **Chris Smith** said the capacity of the Office of the US Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC) and the recipient countries has improved and as such, OGAC will be in a better position to disseminate funds and countries are better equipped to make use of the funds. In addition, the number of focus countries has increased. **Payne** said that \$19 billion has already been expended—\$4 billion more than was appropriated—and that once the system got going the funds were disseminated and absorbed. Also, the number of recipient countries has grown to include countries in the Caribbean, an area of particular interest to Burton. **Berman** stated that reauthorization allows for flexibility in expenditure of funds by taking into account the capacity of OGAC and the recipient countries.

Watson expressed the view that for the initiative to be effective and funds to be absorbed, there is a need to invest in building infrastructure in recipient countries. She specified that infrastructure includes health care workers, health care systems, food and nutrition availability, education and training, equipment, and health centers. She also indicated that linkage programs are critical for sustainability, and that to encourage sustainability there is a need to move away from a donor mentality and develop partnerships with recipient countries.

Rohrabacher completely opposed the bill, calling it an example of “benevolence and generosity gone wild.” He described \$50 billion as an absurd amount and said it was “the most insane thing” he has witnessed in 20 years in Congress. He stated that this bill amounted to giving money to Africans who can prevent the disease through behavior change and legalizing DDT spraying. He said the bill is “a sin against our own people,” and shows that the House is not interested in the American people, veterans, the uninsured, and the poor. He said the US is claiming not to have money to rebuild Afghanistan, but proposes to spend \$50 billion in Africa. To illustrate his point about the uninsured, he informed members that he is having a family crisis due to a family member not having health insurance.

Ackerman responded to Rohrabacher by saying that members on his side of the aisle are trying to establish universal health care, which would fix the problem of the uninsured in the US and also help Rohrabacher’s uninsured family member. He strongly endorses the bill, and underscored his support for a comprehensive prevention strategy by saying that even soldiers who are against the war are advised to wear a helmet.

Flake expressed concern with the process through which the bill was reached. He says that there was no consultation of the members, and that he does not know of any member who participated in negotiating the bill. He feels that they were not given an opportunity to find out why it calls for \$50 billion, and that there should have been a hearing on the increase over the initial \$15 billion and President Bush’s proposed \$30 billion allocation. Aside from that, he said he was pleased with the way the programs were working.

Jackson-Lee stated that the bill represents success, response, and the future. She said it is a good bipartisan effort and that the \$50 billion will enable nations to build capacity and strengthen nongovernmental organizations and their efforts to combat the disease. She is unhappy that the bill does not repeal the Mexico City rule, but is pleased with the inclusion of food security and nutrition for people living with HIV.

Pence said he wanted to be able to read up on the issues raised, especially concern over the \$50 billion authorization amount. But he indicated “cautious” support for the bill, and feels it is important to respond to the epidemic in a way that respects the traditions of the recipient countries and US foreign assistance. He was pleased that the agreement does not allow funding of abortion programs.

Payne responded to questions about the \$50 billion authorization amount by pointing out that President Bush is a fiscal conservative and would not support the bill if he felt that amount was unreasonable.

Fortenberry said he does not want to authorize \$50 billion without having had a chance to read the bill, and that it would be irresponsible of him to support a bill without reviewing its contents.

Berman responded by clarifying that the \$50 billion authorization amount has been in circulation for at least a month.

Carnahan commended Bush on the global AIDS initiative and stated that the bill is important in terms of substance and that the balanced approach will serve the program well.

The *Tom Lantos and Henry J. Hyde United States Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Reauthorization Act of 2008* was passed by the House Foreign Affairs Committee on a bipartisan voice vote.