

DAILY BULLETIN

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U.S. AIDS AMBASSADOR CALLS FOR UNITY AGAINST EPIDEMIC

Focus must stay on saving lives, Tobias says
By Charlene Porter
Washington File Staff Writer

Bangkok, Thailand -- U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator Randall Tobias called for unity in the search for solutions to the world's AIDS epidemic July 14, facing down protestors who attempted to disrupt his speech before a crowd of several hundred at the XV International AIDS Conference.

"Perhaps the most critical mistake we can make is to allow this pandemic to divide us," Tobias told the audience. "We are striving toward the same goal -- a world free of HIV/AIDS. When 8,000 lives are lost to AIDS every day, division is a luxury we cannot afford."

"We may not agree on every tactic employed by every donor," he said, "and we may have passionate opinions about how things can be done better, but we must work with each other to find the best solutions, while knowing that every person in this fight simply wants to save lives."

Tobias, the U.S. AIDS ambassador, made his call for unity even as a group of about 40 protestors chanted derogatory remarks for about 10 minutes before members of the audience and conference officials restored order.

Such protests have become routine at this conference. Many of the demonstrators are people living with HIV/

AIDS who say they do not believe the global community is responding rapidly enough to the plight of HIV-infected people around the world. A French government official and a pharmaceutical company executive faced similar disruptions in attempts to speak at other conference events this week.

U.S. officials participating in the meeting say the protests against the U.S. government campaign against AIDS and its newest program, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), are based in misinterpretation and mischaracterization.

In his speech, Tobias faced those challenges squarely. "I want to get something straight about the U.S. position on prevention, because there seems to be a lot of confusion and misinformation," he said.

He explained one key U.S. strategy for AIDS prevention known as ABC. "Abstinence works. Being faithful works. Condoms work. Each has its place," Tobias said. "Preventing AIDS is not a multiple-choice test -- there is no one right answer to preventing the spread of this pandemic. Those who want to simplify the solution to just one method -- any one method -- do not understand the complexity of the problem."

The U.S. global AIDS coordinator also emphasized that the United States will make people living with HIV/AIDS full partners in the global effort, saying their involvement is vital to success.

"For that reason, we will soon be launching pilot programs in a number of countries that will allow small groups to apply directly to the U.S. Embassies' country teams for rapid approval on small grants," Tobias said. "The idea of this program is to ensure that small and effective organizations that are doing some of the best work on the ground can get money fast to address urgent needs within their communities."

Tobias also addressed criticisms of the PEPFAR plan based in the mistaken belief that the ABC prevention strategy is its sole approach for addressing the spread of the AIDS epidemic.

"[O]ur approach must be based very specifically on what works in each place we are working, with the individuals and groups we are targeting," Tobias said. "For instance, unlike most of our other focus nations, Vietnam's HIV/AIDS epidemic has been fueled by intravenous drug use. As we develop our country plan, we will be looking at

ways to educate those who inject drugs about the added risk of HIV/AIDS, and exploring means to support drug abuse prevention and treatment."

Fourteen African and Caribbean nations were first named as the focus nations of the five-year \$15 billion PEPFAR initiative. President Bush announced the inclusion of Vietnam, the first Asian nation, in June. The 15 nations together are home to approximately half of the estimated 38 million HIV-infected people in the world.

Distribution of aid under the plan began earlier this year, and over the next 12 months it is projected that PEPFAR will help provide antiretroviral (ARV) treatment for 200,000 people who need it and care for 1 million people. Tens of millions will be the beneficiaries of prevention messages and support for improved medical practices, according to U.S. State Department documents issued in June.

Another important element of PEPFAR, Tobias said in his AIDS conference speech, is the sense of urgency behind it. "Within days of receiving funding, we were traveling by motor scooter to deliver antiretroviral drugs to people in their homes in rural Uganda," Tobias said. "Within weeks, we were doubling the number of patients on ARVs in urban Uganda. We put 500 people on therapy at just one site in Kenya. One of our treatment partners has begun therapy for another 500 hundred patients in just two countries, and they are enrolling more patients at a rate of 220 per week."

Delivering as many ARV drugs as possible to as many people as possible is another issue which has stirred significant controversy in the AIDS community. The health crisis has allowed developing world pharmaceutical companies to receive waivers on patent protections held by developed world pharmaceutical companies in order to produce more affordable drugs.

The United States has established an expedited regulatory procedure for manufacturers to submit the so-called generic drugs to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration so that they will undergo the rigorous review that ensures the safety of medicines on the U.S. market.

"It is a moral imperative that families in programs funded by the United States in the developing world have the same assurances as American families that the drugs they use are safe and effective," Tobias said. "America will not have one health standard for her own citizens

and a lower standard of ‘good enough’ for those suffering elsewhere.”

Critics have alleged that the United States is not allowing purchase of the generics with PEPFAR dollars in order to protect the interests of western pharmaceutical companies. Tobias said quality is the issue, not patent protections or profits.

“I have consistently and repeatedly expressed our intent to provide, through the emergency plan, AIDS drugs that are acquired at the lowest possible cost, regardless of origin or who produces them, as long as we know they are safe, effective, and of high quality,” Tobias said.

The U.S. AIDS ambassador closed his remarks with a plea that other governments follow the lead of the United States and rise to the global challenge of the epidemic. “This year America is spending nearly twice as much to fight global AIDS as the rest of the world’s donor governments combined,” he said. “By its actions, the United States has challenged the rest of the world to take action.”

Tobias looked to the future and expressed the hope that the 2004 International AIDS conference will mark the beginning of “an era of compassionate action” in the global response to the epidemic.

“May we all come together,” Tobias urged, “in a spirit of heightened commitment and cooperation, to focus our energies on doing what we must to win this fight -- on behalf of the people of the world who so desperately need our help.”

HOUSE VOTE ON TOBACCO COULD IMPERIL FIX FOR U.S. WTO VIOLATIONS

EU sanctions on U.S. exports to continue until tax issue resolved

By Berta Gomez
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- A vote in the House of Representatives to block buyout payments to tobacco farmers could affect eventual passage of a separate corporate tax bill that would eliminate U.S. export tax breaks ruled illegal by the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The proposed buyout of tobacco farmers was included in a measure approved by the House June 17 to overhaul the corporate tax code and place the United States in compliance with WTO rules. The buyout, which garnered much-needed support from tobacco-state legislators, authorized \$9.6 billion for tobacco farmers in exchange for ending existing government price supports.

But in a July 13 voice vote during consideration of a separate agriculture-spending bill, the House approved an amendment that would prevent the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) from using any of its funds for the tobacco buyout.

“There’s never a good time to spend \$10 billion bailing out the tobacco industry, but in the midst of a war, a deficit, and an economic recovery, this is the worst time,” said Representative Jeff Flake, the Arizona Republican who sponsored the amendment.

The House later passed the \$83.7 billion agriculture bill, 389-31. The measure would provide funding for most operations of USDA and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for fiscal year 2005, which begins October 1.

The House vote was one of several steps that must be taken in the legislative process. For a bill to become law the House and Senate must approve identical versions of the legislation and then send it to the president for his signature or veto.

Congressional aides told reporters they believed the amendment to ban funding for the tobacco buyout would likely be dropped when House and Senate negotiators meet to reconcile their differences on agriculture spending.

However, the tobacco buyout itself will still be up for discussion during House-Senate negotiations on the corporate tax measure. The Senate’s version of the tax overhaul passed May 11 does not include a tobacco buyout. Some senators have warned that they will approve the buyout only if it is combined with new federal regulation of tobacco products by the FDA.

The tax bill would repeal a U.S. law giving tax breaks to certain exports; the WTO has ruled against the law, the Extraterritorial Income Act (ETI), as amounting to illegal export subsidies. ETI is successor to the decades-old Foreign Sales Corporation, which was also ruled a WTO violation.

After repeated European Union (EU) challenges to the U.S. export tax breaks, the WTO authorized the EU to impose sanctions for U.S. noncompliance amounting to \$4 billion a year. The EU began March 1 imposing tariffs of 5 percent and is prepared to increase the level by one percentage point a month up to 17 percent. The rate went up to 9 percent July 1.

SITUATION IN DARFUR MUST CHANGE QUICKLY, POWELL SAYS

Secretary Powell on crisis in western Sudan

(This column by U.S. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell is in the public domain. There are no republication restrictions.)

Those at Risk in Darfur Are Lost Unless Situation Changes Quickly

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell
July 12, 2004

The current conflict in western Sudan puts the lives of more than a million human beings in jeopardy. Marauding Jingaweit militias are destroying villages, raping and killing, and aid to the area is being impeded. The situation must change quickly, before those who are imperiled are lost.

While we in the international community must intensify our efforts to help, the Government of Sudan bears the greatest responsibility -- to face up to this catastrophe and save the lives of its own citizens.

Before I departed Sudan, I gave the Government of Sudan a list of actions that needed to be taken in order to turn around the situation in Darfur. Over the last several days since I visited Darfur, the Government of Sudan has made some announcements with respect to getting the Jingaweit militias under control, allowing humanitarian aid to flow more freely, ending the problem of getting visas for aid workers, and stopping support to those who are intent on violence in Darfur. We are closely monitoring the Government's response to the actions we requested. While the Government has taken some positive

steps, violence is continuing, and we have not yet seen a dramatic turnaround of the situation.

The United States has drafted a U.N. Security Council resolution that is now being discussed with members of the Council, calling upon the Government of Sudan to immediately fulfill all of the commitments it has made to end the violence and give access to aid workers and international monitors. The resolution urges the warring parties to conclude a political agreement without delay. It commits all states to target sanctions against the Jingaweit and those who aid and abet them, as well as others who may have responsibility for this tragic situation.

Sudan's President Omar Hassan A. Al-Bashir has repeatedly pledged to work for peace, and he did so again when we met. But President Bush, the United States Congress, Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the international community want more than promises -- we want to see dramatic improvements on the ground right now.

The United States has been in the forefront of providing emergency humanitarian assistance to the suffering people of Darfur and will remain in the forefront. We have provided \$139 million in this year alone, with another \$161 million identified for next year. But it's time for the entire international community to meet the pledges that they have made. We will also work with the international community to make sure that all of those nations who have made pledges of financial assistance meet those pledges.

The United States will continue to work with our African friends and with the world community to help end conflicts like this one and to bring relief to those who are in such desperate need. Conflict and chaos of the kind that we see in Sudan rob Africans of the future they want, the future they deserve. The goal of an Africa at peace is not an impossible one. It is one that is achievable if we work at it.

Through continuing programs and bold new initiatives, President Bush and his administration are working in partnership with Africans to help them move toward greater democracy, greater opportunity, greater security, and greater hope for a peaceful future for their children.

We will not rest. We will continue to apply pressure. Only actions, not words, can win the race against death in Darfur.

THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN POLITICAL CONVENTIONS

An Interview with Political Scientist Nelson W. Polsby

In a recent interview, Nelson W. Polsby, Heller Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley, spoke with Washington File staff writer Darlisa Crawford about the way political conventions have evolved over the course of U.S. history and the role they play in the 2004 election. Polsby is the author or co-author of 14 books on American politics.

(begin transcript)

Question: What was the role of political conventions in the past and how has it changed? What is the relevance of political conventions today?

Polsby: It's changed a lot. National party conventions used to pick the nominee and now at most, they ratify what's already been done in the process well before the convention. So the role of the convention now is entirely advertising for the nominee and for the party. It's an advertising medium. It is not a real decision making organization anymore.

Q: Have the mechanics of conventions -- how candidates are selected and how platforms are presented -- changed?

A: Not much. No. The mechanics are roughly the same, but the significance is completely different now.

Q: How has television changed political conventions over the years?

A: The real coverage of television started in 1952. It's changed enormously, of course, because there used to be something to cover and there isn't anymore. So, the television networks are cutting way back on what they show, simply because they realize that there is no significance to what is going on except as advertising.

Q: World Wide Web coverage of conventions started in 2000. Will cyber-coverage have any impact on the political conventions in 2004?

A: I assume not. No. I don't see how they could have an impact on the conventions. It is simply a different set of channels through which advertising can proceed. In that sense, it is very important. I think the Internet and that

kind of stuff is more and more important in mobilizing voters and raising money. So, the Internet is very important, but it won't have any impact on the convention. However, the convention may have some impact on it.

Q: According to Campaign Finance Institute analysis, private donations rose 208 percent in 2000 and are projected to rise another 297 percent in 2004. Can you please comment on the role of private donations in relation to political conventions?

A: They don't have much to do with political conventions. They do have a lot to do with making it possible to spread the message around the respective candidates. The population of the country grows. Expenses go up all the time. Of course, you have to spend more money to stand still. Political money is being mobilized somewhat more efficiently today than it was true a few years ago. Mainly, I think because of the Internet.

Q: What do you think political conventions will look like in the future?

A: They have been on a declining curve for some time. I think that they will probably gently decline even more. They are just advertising. That is all they are. Of course, they might be interesting, if and only if, intra-party squabbling breaks out and some faction within a political party attempts to embarrass the nominee. That's interesting and reportable news and people will be on top of that, but other than that, I don't think the future holds much for national party conventions, unless they change the rules of nomination, which I think is unlikely in the near term.

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