



December 1, 2006

Dear Friends:

December 1st is World AIDS Day, and it is a time to reflect on the progress we have made against this disease during the 25 years since the first AIDS cases were reported. More importantly, it is an opportunity to recommit to fighting this great humanitarian disaster that has claimed the lives of 25 million people.

Nearly 40 million people worldwide are living with HIV, and a recent UNAIDS and the World Health Organization report shows that we are not doing enough to contain the spread of the AIDS pandemic. While some countries have experienced a decrease in infection rates, countries like Uganda have reversed progress previously made and are observing an increase in new infection rates. [Click here](#) to read a fact sheet or [click here](#) to view a slide show on this report. Our worldwide commitment to ending AIDS and expanding access to prevention, treatment and care services must be renewed and strengthened.

While great strides have been made in fighting AIDS, including the development of a test to screen for HIV and finding treatments that have improved lives, we have yet to discover a cure or a vaccine to eliminate this disease. In addition, while access to prevention and treatment services has recently increased, nearly 7 million people worldwide still do not have access to life-saving anti-retroviral drugs. As the rate of infection continues to rise, we must improve our efforts.

The *Ryan White CARE Act* funds critical health care and support services for patients and families affected by HIV and AIDS in the U.S. Two months ago, I voted for the reauthorization of the *Ryan White CARE Act*, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives. This legislation currently awaits action by the U.S. Senate. I hope that the Senate takes action before Congress adjourns for the year.

Racial and ethnic health disparities are too prevalent in this country and around the world, especially the case regarding HIV and AIDS. Communities of color have disproportionately higher rates of the disease. Infection rates are highest among Africans and African Americans, compared to any other racial or ethnic group. In Minnesota, African American women are 46 times more likely than white women to have AIDS. In order to effectively address these inequalities, we need to increase our investment in targeted community-based health prevention, screenings, and treatment.

HIV/AIDS knows no national boundaries. The pandemic is claiming the lives of 8,000 women, men and children every day across Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, AIDS has left 12 million children orphans. The commitment, resources and leadership of the U.S. must be coordinated with the world community to achieve maximum impact. There is much more work to do.

Responding to the AIDS pandemic requires courage and commitment. I commend the individuals and nonprofit organizations here in Minnesota and around the globe that are working everyday to combat HIV and AIDS. On World AIDS Day, I challenge the U.S. to renew its commitment to all those affected by HIV/AIDS.



Rep. McCollum is joined by John and Linda Gabriel of St. Paul to commemorate the presentation of a Purple Heart to John. John was wounded in Vietnam where he served as Sergeant in the U.S. Army 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, A Company from 1968-1969.

Sincerely,

Congresswoman Betty McCollum  
Serving Minnesota's Fourth Congressional District

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