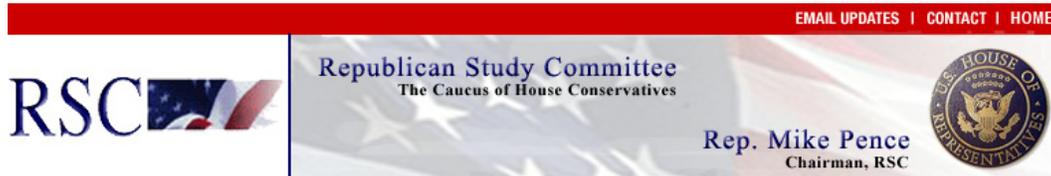


The Republican Study Committee has posted a discussion on the recent International AIDS Conference.

[http://www.house.gov/htbin/blog\\_inc?BLOG,in06\\_pence\\_rsc.blogauth/Joelle%20Cannon,999,All,No%20Authors%20found,TEMPLATE=blog\\_byauth.shtml](http://www.house.gov/htbin/blog_inc?BLOG,in06_pence_rsc.blogauth/Joelle%20Cannon,999,All,No%20Authors%20found,TEMPLATE=blog_byauth.shtml)



## RSC BLOG

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### [The XVI International AIDS Conference: Time to Deliver](#)

Posted by Joelle Cannon (August 24, 2006, 04:10 PM)

Toronto, Canada recently hosted the XVI International AIDS Conference, a week-long gathering of AIDS activists, philanthropists, and international government officials, which according to its [website](#), was intended to be “a landmark opportunity for science, government, community, and leadership from around the world to advance our collective response to the epidemic.” This year’s conference theme was *Time to Deliver*, focusing on “continued urgency in bringing effective HIV prevention and treatment strategies to communities the world over.”

Unfortunately, most reports detailing events at the conference tell a story not of a week filled with hope for the AIDS community, but a week of [overrepresented Hollywood](#) celebrities, while actual AIDS patients were [few and far between](#), [sex workers](#) demanded legal recognition of their trade, including paid vacation, while a constant [drum beat](#) could be heard against the [President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief](#) (PEPFAR), disdain was obvious at every mention of [abstinence](#) as a possible method for controlling the spread of this horrific disease, and a host of activities egregious enough to appall even the casual observer. Never mind the fact that PEPFAR has become the single most effective initiative in fighting the deadly scourge, treating thousands of Africans who would otherwise have become victims of the [AIDS virus](#) and that the most dramatic reduction in HIV/AIDS in the world occurred in [Uganda using the ABc](#) (**A**bstain, **B**e faithful, use **c**ondoms) program that emphasized abstinence and being faithful.

Just one of the many endeavors at this year’s conference included the extensive

use of condoms as a fashion accessory. Dubbed “The Condom Project,” conference attendees were invited to use various colored condoms to create a lapel pin. Another facet of this project consisted of mannequins clothed in attire made entirely of condoms on display for all to see ([even young girls](#)). [Reuters](#) reported that according to the Condom Project’s executive director the condom fashions aim “to get people comfortable about condoms, especially those living in countries where the little piece of latex is considered taboo.” Even the [New York Times](#) compared this meeting to a circus!

As previously noted, throughout the conference, references to the PEPFAR and U.S. efforts to combat AIDS on a global scale were met with blatant disapproval. Despite the fact that the President’s plan includes spending \$15 billion fighting AIDS (PEPFAR is the largest donor program for HIV/AIDS), one [article](#) reported that “about 50 protesters, most of whom are delegates at the International AIDS Conference, on Wednesday urged the U.S. government to play a greater role in the fight against AIDS.” In addition, celebrities and activists alike spoke in opposition to the U.S. policy, which requires that 33 percent of prevention funding be spent on abstinence programs. However, current *law* requires that only 20 percent of PEPFAR be spent on prevention, which means that about 7 percent of the entire program is actually used for abstinence education. Nonetheless, [Gay City News](#) detailed the conference this way:

From top to bottom in Toronto, PEPFAR has been a target for suspicion. Though many credit the half-million people it has put on anti-retroviral drugs, at least some hostility greets most appearances by U.S. officials. ...Activists hope to use the conference to build momentum to overturn what they call PEPFAR’s emphasis on abstinence-until-marriage programs and de-emphasis of condom distribution.

The federal government was well represented at the conference, as 78 employees of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) attended the event. In a [response](#) to recent congressional inquiry, HHS estimated that expenses associated with sending these employees to the conference would cost approximately \$315,000, including \$170,000 for the hotel and food, \$45,000 for registration, and \$65,000 for travel, among additional costs. Some would argue these costs are underestimated when taking into consideration that numerous HHS grantees likely used federal funding to send their own employees to the conference. Other federal agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) were also represented.

AIDS is a serious epidemic, and some [sources](#) estimate approximately 40 million individuals world-wide are suffering from AIDS. However, tracking these numbers is increasingly difficult, and millions who are infected go undiagnosed, without treatment. Many conservatives believe that fighting this horrific disease should be aggressively undertaken (and it is), but some may view the XVI International AIDS Conference as falling short of the seriousness demanded by such an important issue.

In his keynote address, conference co-chair Stephen Lewis stated that “what has to happen is we place a temporary moratorium on the endless, self-indulgent proliferation of meetings, seminars, round tables, discussion groups, task forces ad nauseum, plus the production of reports, documents, monographs, statistical data and concentrate every energy at country level.”

Conservatives agree-- Let's stop the AIDS junkets, starting with this very conference, and start putting our resources where they can actually help those impacted by HIV/AIDS. Don't expect that to happen any time soon, as AIDS conferences are already planned well into the future, all in exotic or hip urban settings. There is, for example, the Ryan White CARE Act Grantee Meeting & Clinical Conference August 28-31, 2006, in Washington, DC; the AIDS Vaccine 2006 Conference August 29- September 1 in Amsterdam, Netherlands; the 2006 United States Conference on AIDS September 21 – 25 in Hollywood, Florida; the North American AIDS Treatment Action Forum November 27-30, 2005, in Oaxaca, Mexico; and the 2008 International AIDS conference will be held in Mexico City from August 3 to 8.

As so many continue to live without treatment, and no vaccine or cure is likely anytime in the foreseeable future, it is unconscionable that federal resources are being wasted on an endless AIDS circuit party.