

Statement of Patricia Bass, Chair, CAEAR Coalition On the Vice Presidential Debate

October 6, 2004

Patricia Bass, Chair of the Communities Advocating for Emergency AIDS Relief (CAEAR) Coalition, issued a call to action today after a statement by Vice President Dick Cheney in the Vice Presidential debates last night.

When the debate moderator, PBS's Gwen Ifill, thoughtfully asked if he knew that black women between the ages of 25 and 44 are 13 times more likely to die of the disease than their counterparts, Vice President Cheney stated: "I have not heard those numbers with respect to African-American women. I was not aware that it was -- that they're in epidemic there...."

Ms. Bass' Statement:

Sadly, Vice President Cheney honestly reflected the ignorance that exists at the federal level of government regarding the true impact of HIV/AIDS in America today. There are many folks who feel his statement reflects the Administration's and the Congress's failure to pay enough attention, to recognize and to act upon the dire need to provide basic health care and support services for people living with HIV/AIDS here at home. It is impossible to effectively respond to a crisis when you don't know it exists.

As an African American woman whose community has been devastated by HIV/AIDS and who has watched as untold numbers of my sisters have struggled against this disease, I am saddened by the fact that the desolation wrought by this epidemic in the United States has not registered with our nation's leaders.

Since President Bush and Vice President Cheney took office, the number of people living with AIDS in the United States has increased by almost 100,000 cases and 40,000 people have continued to become infected with HIV every year.

At the same time, the Administration and Congress have flat-funded the Ryan White CARE Act for primary care and support services, and waited for dangerous waiting lists to form for pharmaceuticals provided through the AIDS Drug Assistance Program before attempting to fix that problem. In his response to the Vice President, Senator Edwards missed a clear opportunity to speak out on the need for greater support of the CARE Act and other programs in place now to care for people with HIV/AIDS.

It is time for a wake-up call to all of our leaders. It is time to increase funds for the Ryan White CARE Act with an additional \$425 million. Congress has the appropriations legislation before it now, it should act now, and the Administration should call for this action immediately.

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At the same time, we will redouble our efforts to educate the nation's leaders and decision makers about the appalling statistics regarding the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among African American women and other severely impacted communities, and the need to support the CARE Act, which is the foundation of the nation's ability to meet the needs of these communities.

The CAEAR Coalition is the national grassroots organization advocating on behalf of people living with HIV/AIDS who rely on Title I and Title III of the Ryan White CARE Act for primary health care and support services. The CARE Act is the nation's largest discretionary program for people living with HIV/AIDS and supports direct service programs in medically underserved communities in urban and rural communities across the U.S.

For more information – www.caeear.org

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