Action Jackson

May 1, 2000 By Shana Naomi Krochmal

WASHINGTON, DC—The Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr. opened up and said “ah” for a grip-and-grin oral HIV test (administered by counselor Jamal Spurlock) during the second National Conference on African-Americans and AIDS in late February.

Whitman-Walker Clinic’s Max Robinson Center played host to the famed orator, who was flanked by AIDS czar Sandra Thurman and Now and Again TV actor Dennis Haysbert. “Nobody is safe,” Jackson said. “I want to send a message to every African American that does not know his or her HIV status to get tested. It’s a step in getting people medical care and stopping people from unknowingly infecting others. As leaders in the community, we can’t just talk the talk, we must walk the walk.” Never one to miss a media-saturated moment, Jackson then called on President Bill Clinton, Senator wanna-be Hillary Clinton and all presidential candidates to follow in his footsteps, saying they should help retire the testing taboo and “be discussing AIDS as much as the Confederate flag.” Jackson’s standing-room-only speech earlier that day at the conference—following a load of lip-service from Thurman and Health and Human Services head Donna Shalala that put some in the early-morning crowd asleep—rocked the house, leaving each subsequent speaker and scientist to take the stage holding their stats and slides like security blankets

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