Obama’s Global AIDS Policy to Promote Condom Use

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President-elect Barack Obama will reverse U.S. family planning and AIDS-prevention strategies that have long linked global funding to antiabortion policies and abstinence education, Bloomberg reports.

President George W. Bush’s $45 billion President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) brought HIV medication to 3 million people in poor countries such as Rwanda and Uganda but still requires health workers to emphasize abstinence from sex over condoms. It’s a policy that has set back sexually transmitted disease prevention and family planning globally, according to Susan F. Wood, co-chairman of Obama’s advisory committee for women’s health.

Gill Greer, director general of the International Planned Pregnancy Federation in London, agreed. “The U.S. administration has certainly succeeded in demonizing condoms rather than showing that they can be part of prevention of both unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections,” Greer said.

While both Democrats and Republicans indicated support for PEPFAR’s focus on abstinence, which has also been shown to reduce the spread of HIV, others maintain that the decision to focus on abstinence was “ naïve and dangerous” and that it neglected prevention techniques with the most science behind them, said Mitchell Warren, executive director of the New York-based AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition

Wood said that Obama is committed to family planning services—both in the U.S. and the developing world—that help prevent unintended pregnancy, reduce maternal and infant mortality and prevent the spread of disease.

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