Obama’s Fuzzy Math

May 13, 2010 By Tim Horn

Activists of all stripes are gathering in New York for a protest--this afternoon (Thursday, May 13th)--outside the St. Regis Hotel where President Barack Obama will be making an appearance at a ritzy $15,000-a-plate fundraiser for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. The reason? To remind President Obama that the U.S. must remain committed to fighting the AIDS epidemic in all corners of the world and that now is not the time to retreat from this effort.

In his recent New York Times report, Donald G. McNeil Jr. paints a grim picture of the situation in Uganda:

> On the grounds of Uganda’s biggest AIDS clinic, Dinavance Kamukama sits under a tree and weeps. Her disease is probably quite advanced: her kidneys are failing and she is so weak she can barely walk. Leaving her young daughter with family, she rode a bus four hours to the hospital where her cousin Allen Bamurekye, born infected, both works and gets the drugs that keep her alive.
>
> But there are no drugs for Ms. Kamukama. As is happening in other clinics in Kampala, all new patients go on a waiting list. A slot opens when a patient dies. “So many people are being supported by America,” Ms.

Kamukama, 28, says mournfully. “Can they not help me as well?”

The answer increasingly is no. Uganda is the first and most obvious example of how the war on global AIDS is falling apart.

“In Uganda,” McNeil adds, “where fewer than 10,000 were on drugs a decade ago, nearly 200,000 now are, largely as a result of American generosity. But the golden window is closing.”

And the window isn’t closing solely in Uganda. Grants to keep 200,000 people living with HIV in Kenya are set to expire soon. What’s more, an American-run program in Mozambique has been told to stop opening clinics. There have also been drug shortages reported in Nigeria and Swaziland, along with treatment slots being trimmed in Tanzania and Botswana.

Reasons for these cuts, from the White House, are plentiful: The U.S. government doesn’t have the money to maintain its commitment; budgets are tight; Wall Street needed to be bailed out.

But according to Robert Naiman, policy director of Just Foreign Policy, in his May 12 Huffington Post article, the justifications from the White House don’t make sense. He writes:

Michel Sidibe, executive director of Unaids, says there is a global shortfall of about $17 billion for controlling the epidemic. The expected U.S. share of such a shortfall would be about a third, or $5.6 billion.

Meanwhile, Congress is about to be asked to fork over $33 billion in our tax dollars for more war in Afghanistan. This $33 billion would only pay for four months of the war, until the end of the fiscal year, when next year’s appropriation will become available.

So on an annual basis, we're being asked to spend almost 20 times more on killing in Afghanistan than it is claimed that we don't have to help stop Africa and Haiti from being decimated by AIDS.

Or, to put it another way: if we could end the war in Afghanistan, then every year we'd save $99 billion compared to the world in which the war continues. We could use $5.6 billion to pay what we owe on controlling the AIDS epidemic, and have $93.4 billion left for domestic job creation, tax cuts, going to the beach, whatever ya want.

Which brings activists to New York, potentially in droves, to fire a warning shot across President Obama's bow and to stress that his math--and, indeed, his priorities--are fuzzy and don't jive with the vital commitment the U.S. has made to the global fight against HIV/AIDS.

The protest begins at 5:00 on Thursday, May 13th, outside the St. Regis Hotel at 55th Street and 5th Avenue in New York City. It's being organized by a heady coaltion of advocacy groups, including ACT UP Philadelphia, ACT UP/New York, Africa Action, African Services Committee, Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP), NYC AIDS Housing Network, VOCAL-NY Users Union, Housing Works, Health GAP, AMSA and Philadelphia Global AIDS Watchdogs

---

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.