NOW JOINS PBS’ WEEK OF GLOBAL HEALTH COVERAGE WITH A TWO-PART BROADCAST ON AMERICA’S GLOBAL HIV/AIDS POLICY

In 2003, President Bush announced the most far-reaching program ever devised to treat people with HIV/AIDS around the world in an unprecedented effort by the U.S. to save those suffering from otherwise terminal diseases. The effort, which makes the HIV/AIDS pandemic a priority of U.S. foreign policy, marks an enormous evolution from America’s stance on the disease, given that in the early years of the crisis President Reagan refused to utter the word “AIDS” publicly. The Bush policy also has generated controversy. Building on the three-night groundbreaking PBS special *Rx for Survival—A Global Health Challenge*, NOW presents a two-part broadcast that traces the history of U.S. global health policy on HIV/AIDS and takes a look at how President Bush’s program is playing out on the ground in one key country, Uganda.

In “Global Health: Today's Challenge,” airing Friday, November 4, 2005 at 8:30 P.M. on PBS (check local listings), NOW’s David Brancaccio takes on the latest news about global health issues in a long-form interview with former President Jimmy Carter, who has worked tirelessly on behalf of those in the world afflicted with disease who are isolated, forgotten, and ignored. Carter just returned from Ethiopia in his fight against Trachoma, a painful and debilitating disease that causes blindness.

In “Global Health: America’s Response,” airing Friday, November 4, 2005 at 9:00 P.M. on PBS (check local listings), award-winning producer Tom Casciato examines the U.S.’s HIV/AIDS policy from its beginning in the early 1980s through President Bush’s historic plan, which has been hailed as a significant step in addressing the world’s AIDS crisis. The program takes viewers on the ground in Uganda—considered one of the few success stories in the developing world in slowing the spread of the virus—examines the controversy surrounding prevention strategies, and asks whether America can sustain this ambitious and expensive effort of keeping so many around the world alive with drug treatment.
“What we found in Uganda is remarkable,” says Casciato. “People are alive today because the U.S. is paying for the drugs to keep them alive. But, because of the nature of the disease, it is an effort that must continue indefinitely or those same people will begin to die. The President has set the United States on a path from which it will be difficult to diverge—politically or morally.”

The success in Uganda has been credited to local leadership, which unlike that of the West and other African countries, met the epidemic head on in the mid 1980s. NOW examines how Uganda’s successful three pronged approach, which has become known as ABC: “Abstinence,” “Be faithful,” and “Condom use,” has sparked controversy among both American and Ugandan groups which don’t believe condoms are effective in reducing HIV prevalence and that they contribute to promiscuity. Buoyed by the fact that 30% of U.S. money in President Bush’s plan is set aside for teaching abstinence, these groups promote so-called “abstinence-only” programs, which downplay or ignore the importance of condoms in HIV prevention. NOW assesses Uganda’s success and looks at the credibility of arguments for and against teaching “abstinence-only.”

The program also addresses the question of how did America get from the early part of the AIDS epidemic, when President Reagan refused to acknowledge the disease, to committing $15 billion to treat people around the world? The program gives viewers the behind-the-scenes perspectives of insiders, including scientists and government officials like Dr. C. Everett Koop, the Surgeon General under Reagan, who says he was muzzled by the administration when he wanted to speak out about AIDS prevention, and Anthony S. Fauci, M.D., Director National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who notes the important role played not only by America’s scientists and government officials, but also its AIDS activists.

“If in the ’80s the U.S. government [and] the African governments, who were in as strong a denial as the top leadership in this country, if we would all have acted with the same amount of money and energy and commitment in the ’80s as we have today, tens of millions of people would still be alive,” says Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS, the main advocate for coordinated global action on the epidemic.
NOW airs Friday nights at 8:30 p.m. on PBS (check local listings) and is a production of JumpStart Productions, LLC in association with Thirteen/WNET New York. The executive producer for NOW is John Siceloff. The producer of “Global Health: America’s Response” is Tom Casciato.

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Preview cassettes of “Global Health: America’s Response” are available upon request.

PRESS CONTACT:
Rick Byrne
Ph: 212.560.8406
Email: ByrneR@thirteen.org