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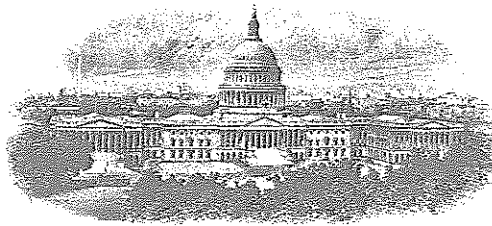
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Statement of Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis
National Latino AIDS Awareness Day Briefing
October 14, 2008

I would like to welcome you to today's Congressional briefing and thank the Hispanic Federation and the Latino Commission on AIDS for organizing today's briefing.

The need to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS in the Latino community is greater than ever. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported that the number of new HIV cases was much higher than expected. Although Latinos make up about 15 percent of the U.S. population, they represent at least 22 percent of all new HIV/AIDS diagnoses. However, this number could be much higher, as this number does not include data from California.

I am pleased that Congress recently repealed the law barring HIV-positive visitors and immigrants from entering the United States. I am also proud to have included language in the Minority AIDS Initiative that recognizes the importance of culturally and linguistically competent services. However, the level of federal support to address HIV/AIDS in communities of color is not commensurate with the increasing need.

To tackle the epidemic among Latinos, we must address language and cultural barriers, stigma, migration issues, and distrust of the health system for immigrants. We need to talk about HIV/AIDS, educate ourselves, and take steps to prevent HIV/AIDS from infecting people in the first place. We need accurate data reporting. We need access to culturally appropriate health care. This means recognizing the diversity among Latinos and understanding that Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and South Americans have different cultures and needs. We also need more funding so that campaigns targeted to Latinos, such as those operated by Bienestar, Kaiser Family Foundation and Univision reach Latinos in all parts of the United States.

Despite our diversity, Latinos all have one thing in common -we want to prevent our loved ones from dying of AIDS. The theme of this year's National Latino AIDS Awareness Day (NLAAD), which was established to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS among Latinos, is appropriate. "*Unidos Podemos: HIV/AIDS Stops Here. Prevention Starts with Us,*" reflects the importance of working together to educate *nuestra gente* to prevent the infection from spreading, encourage HIV testing, provide medical treatment and care, and advocate for those living with HIV/AIDS.

By gathering at briefings like this we are demonstrating our commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS. I look forward to continuing our partnership to stop this deadly epidemic in the Latino community.