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### HIV VACCINE AWARENESS DAY

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I rise today to express grave concern regarding the misplaced priority of annually deeming this day, May 18, HIV Vaccine Awareness Day. This year marks the 13th annual observance of a day that epitomizes our government's inability to set priorities with the Federal dollars this body is entrusted.

According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, NIAID, Web site:

This annual observance is a day to recognize and thank the thousands of volunteers, community members, health professionals, and scientists who are working together to find a safe and effective HIV vaccine. It is also a day to educate our communities about the importance of preventive HIV vaccine research.

As a practicing physician and former cochair of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV and AIDS, I believe the development of a safe and effective HIV vaccine should be among our Nation's highest health care priorities. HIV/AIDS continues to devastate communities in the United States and around the world. In the United States, more than 50,000 people become infected with HIV each year. Approximately 40 million people are living with HIV around the world, with more than 5 million new infections each year. To date, more than 25 million men, women and children are believed to have died from AIDS worldwide.

Unfortunately, we have not yet developed an effective HIV/AIDS vaccine--nor are we close. At a time when our national debt is approaching \$13 trillion and patients suffering from HIV/AIDS are being put on waiting lists for life-saving drug treatments, we simply cannot afford to mispend \$1 million a year to make people aware of a nonexistent vaccine.

Furthermore, this well-intentioned propaganda campaign is being funded at the expense of HIV vaccine research itself. Regardless of the intentions, the unfortunate fact is that finite resources intended for HIV vaccine research are being siphoned away for a project without any potential scientific benefit. With no effective vaccine likely anytime soon, it seems silly, or worse, to waste funding that could be much better spent on research or scientific investments that could one day lead to a vaccine.

The discovery of a vaccine or cure, after all, would be the best way to thank the researchers and volunteers. As every cent counts in this endeavor, it is unconscionable that precious dollars are being squandered by NIAID's well intentioned but unnecessary public relations campaign.

Between 2001 and 2005, NIH spent more than \$5.2 million on this ``HIV vaccine awareness'' campaign, not including staff time or travel expenses. It is reasonable to assume that the federal government continues to waste over \$1 million annually on HIV vaccine awareness, despite the fact that no vaccine exists and scientists believe that it is unlikely that a HIV vaccine will be developed anytime soon.

Some of the HIV Vaccine Awareness Day events supported in the past include various lunch and dinner receptions, a fashion show in Massachusetts, a bar night in Tennessee, a bar event and entertainment contest in Washington, and other gatherings and media events. Clearly, this awareness campaign serves no obvious public health or scientific value.

There is no doubt, however, that development of an HIV/AIDS vaccine should be a national priority. HIV/AIDS continues to devastate communities in the United States and around the world. At least 56,000 Americans become infected with HIV each year. More than 33 million people are living with HIV around the world, with more than 2.5 million new infections each year. To date, more than 20 million men, women and children are believed to have died from AIDS worldwide.

The development of a safe and effective HIV vaccine should be among our Nation's highest health care priorities. It imperative that not a single dollar of the Federal funds set aside for the development of an

effective HIV vaccine is wasted.

This year, Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, NIAID, highlighted what he called ``significant progress in HIV vaccine research during the past year.'' The study he referred to was a clinical trial in Thailand finding a vaccine to be 31 percent effective at preventing HIV infection. Unfortunately, the results of this study have been found to be statistically insignificant and the findings of the study have received much skepticism. This latest clinical trial is the latest in a long line of promising but unsuccessful attempts at creating an HIV/AIDS vaccine.

Dr. Fauci in recent years has conceded publicly that no one has been very close to developing a vaccine that would prevent infection. Over the past 5 years, in fact, two large clinical trials of HIV vaccines have failed to demonstrate efficacy of the candidate being tested. The disputed Thailand trial aside, this is still the case today.

Most scientists involved in AIDS research believe that an HIV vaccine is further away than ever and some have admitted that effective immunization against the virus may never be possible, according to a survey conducted released in 2008.

A poll of scientists reflects the declaration made at a NIH ``summit meeting'' in 2008 that was ``tantamount to an admission that almost no progress has been made in the search for an AIDS vaccine in the past 25 years and that something close to new start is necessary.'' The government scientists announced that ``more of their budget needs to be spent on basic lab research and less on testing the current crop of vaccines, none of which has proved useful in human trials.'' In light of these failures and daunting prospects, Dr. Fauci pledged to re-evaluate the use of all \$1.5 billion his agency spends on AIDS noting that ``we are going to have to justify what we are doing.''

Dr. Anthony Fauci has noted that while Federal funding for the National Institutes of Health, NIH, continues to increase, it will not increase as quickly as it has the past decade, and as a result, NIH must concentrate on more promising research. Fauci said the heads of NIH institutes such as his had been told to reexamine the entire research portfolio to ensure ``the most bang for the buck.'' The AIDS vaccine candidates that don't show early results in clinical trials could be shut down, he said.

That may mean cutting back some AIDS vaccine research even though virtually all health experts agree a vaccine will be the only way to stop the pandemic of a virus that is incurable, always fatal and that continues to spread worldwide and in the U.S.

As I have done in the past, I am sending a letter today to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to inquire about this misuse of funds. It is my sincere hope that the Department of Health and Human Services will cease spending Federal dollars on this misplaced priority and reinvest these HIV/AIDS dollars into actual research or care.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record my letter dated May 18, 2010, to Secretary Kathleen Sebelius.

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There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

U.S. Senate

Washington, DC, May 18, 2010.

Hon. Kathleen Sebelius,  
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services,  
Washington, DC.

Dear Secretary Sebelius: As a practicing physician and former co-chair of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV and AIDS, I believe the development of a safe and effective HIV vaccine should be among our nation's highest health care priorities. HIV/AIDS continues to devastate communities in the United States and around the world. In the United States, more than 50,000 people become infected with HIV each year. To date, more than 25 million men, women and children are believed to have died from AIDS worldwide.

During this time of fiscal restraint when our nation is faced with an approximately \$13 trillion national debt and over 1,000 individuals on waiting lists for life-saving HIV/AIDS drug treatments, we must be careful that not a single dollar that could pay off this debt or serve some other vital service--such as developing an HIV vaccine--is diverted for less important purposes.

According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) website, May 18, 2010 marks the thirteenth annual HIV Vaccine Awareness Day: ``This annual observance is a day to recognize and thank the thousands of volunteers, community members, health professionals, and scientists who are working together to find a safe and effective HIV vaccine. It is also a day to educate our communities about the importance of preventive HIV vaccine research.''

In addition to my concern that these funds are diverted from the more important goals of developing a vaccine or providing care to patients in need, HIV Vaccine Awareness Day has been marked by specific examples of wasteful spending. In the past, related expenditures have included various lunch and dinner receptions, a fashion show in Massachusetts, a bar night in Tennessee, a bar event and entertainment contest in Washington, and other gatherings and media events.

Would you please provide:

(1) The total amount of federal funding that was spent to promote ``HIV Awareness Day'' in 2010 and for each fiscal year since its inception in 2001, including staff time and travel costs;

(2) If this event is planned for next year please, an estimate of its likely cost;

(3) A list of all organizations that received funding from NIAID as part of ``HIV Vaccine Awareness Day'' since its inception and a description of the activities performed with these funds; and

(4) The total amount NIH has spent on actual HIV vaccine research in each year from fiscal year 2001 through 2010.

Thank you for your attention to this request. I look forward to a prompt reply.

Sincerely,  
Senator Tom Coburn, MD.

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