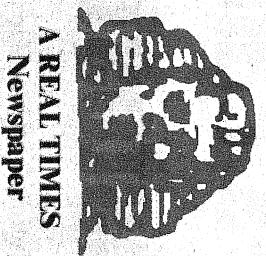


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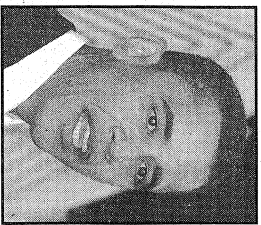
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A new hope for preventing the spread of HIV

by Barack Obama

25 to 34.



Over the last few years, it's become clear that women are rapidly becoming the new face of the AIDS epidemic, both here in the United States and around the world. And on this International Women's Day, we're

faced with sobering statistics that by the end of today, another 7,000 women will have been infected with HIV. In the United States, the percentage of women diagnosed with AIDS has quadrupled over the last twenty years.

Particularly vulnerable are African American women, who contracted the disease at a rate twenty times greater than white women and five times greater than Latinas in 2003. In fact, AIDS is now the number one cause of death among African American women aged

Unfortunately, the same prevention options that

work for men don't always work for women. Many times, the typical woman who gets infected with HIV has had only one partner — her husband. Women don't always know if their partners have been faithful, and because this factor has contributed to the spread of HIV to more and more women, the need for greater prevention strategies has become urgent.

Fortunately, while this International Women's Day brings us the same hard realities about HIV/AIDS, it also brings us a new hope. Today, the world is within reach of a revolutionary advance that could ultimately save a generation of women.

Microbicides are a class of products currently under development that women could use to

protect themselves from contracting HIV, even while conceiving children. When fully developed, experts predict that these microbicides could stop 2.5 million infections over three years in women, men, and infants.

Imagine saving the lives of 2.5 million people; two and one-half million mothers, daughters, husbands, sisters, and friends. It is a powerful hope, but one that cannot be realized without powerful motivation from the public.

So far, nations across the globe, including the United States, have been supporters of this research. Additionally, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the World Bank and the European Commission have also provided significant funding for this cause.

But we need more help. Despite the opportunity that exists here, existing public funding for microbicides is still

too small and short-term to get the job done. Currently, an additional \$1 billion in microbicide research and development is needed to make this promise real.

That's why today, I'm joining Democratic Senator Jon Corzine and Republican Senator Olympia Snowe to introduce the "Microbicide Development Act," which is legislation that would encourage scientific leadership on this issue and strengthen research and development programs at the National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control, and USAID. The legislation would also establish a unit at the NIH specifically dedicated to microbicide research.

The genius of American innovation, when bolstered by the generosity of the American people, has led us to discoveries that have saved the lives of millions since the earliest days of our founding. From penicillin to polio, from unlocking the secret

of the human genome to unleashing the promise of current HIV medications, we continue to open doors and lift hopes with our passion for knowledge and our compassion for our brothers and sisters.

Now is our time to do it again. The AIDS epidemic has already ravaged the lives of far too many across the globe. And as the threat to women everywhere rises, we must do anything and everything we can to protect our population and prevent the spread of HIV. Microbicides are not a "maybe someday" project. This is now. And if we agree to this relatively small commitment, in just a short time we will see big results. And a few years from now, we'll be celebrating an International Women's Day with statistics showing us that the spread of this deadly virus is on the decline once and for all.

Barack Obama is a member of the United States Senate.