

Bush budget rapped for cutting AIDS money: Christian groups say president is not following through on promise

News in the [February 24, 2004](#) issue

Shrunken AIDS funding in President Bush's 2005 budget proposal has dampened the spirits of Christian groups and aid organizations, whose spokespersons said he is not following through on his promise to combat the disease globally.

"We all heard [Bush] make a very powerful and passionate statement about global AIDS in last year's State of the Union address, but this year he didn't say anything about AIDS," said David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, a grass-roots Christian antihunger lobby group. "Now that we see his budget, it's clear that he's not willing to make financial commitments that are in keeping with his promises of a year ago."

Bush's Global AIDS Initiative is accompanied by other multilateral programs to total \$2.8 billion toward the fight against AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean. Groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals pressured Bush last month to include in his budget proposal a \$3.6 billion catch-up on his 2003 Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief that promised \$15 billion over five years. The first installment last year was \$2.4 billion.

Maureen Shea, director of the Episcopal Church's U.S. government relations office, said her denomination is particularly concerned about Bush's funding cutback for multilateral AIDS organizations such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, for which the president proposed \$200 million, down \$350 million from 2004.

"We have particular concerns about the Global Fund because once people [with HIV/AIDS] have started on treatment, you have to keep people on treatment or it won't work," Shea said.

Shea said the fight against HIV/ AIDS is a worldwide issue that should be tackled with multilateral programs like the Global Fund, which combines resources from several countries. "The piece that he's cutting, the Global Fund, is the one that serves the most number of countries," she said. -*Religion News Service*