

SENATOR JON S. CORZINE
MICROBICIDES DEVELOPMENT ACT INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT
NOVEMBER 30, 2001

Mr. President, I rise today to introduce legislation, the Microbicides Development Act of 2001. I am very pleased to be introducing this bipartisan bill along with my colleagues, Senators Snowe, Cantwell, Dodd, Leahy and Murray. I extend my gratitude to Senator Cantwell, in particular, for her support and assistance in the development of this legislation. Additionally, I applaud the efforts of my colleague in the House of Representatives, Republican Congresswoman Connie Morella of Maryland, for her leadership on this important issue. We all believe this initiative is vital to the pursuit of combating the global HIV/AIDS crisis.

As you know, Mr. President, tomorrow, December 1st, is World AIDS Day. Twenty years ago, the Centers for Disease Control became aware of a virus that was claiming the lives of thousands of gay men in the United States. Throughout most of the 1980s, we thought of AIDS purely as a gay men's disease. Twenty years later, we find that we couldn't have been more wrong – as we have seen this disease spread globally to women, children and heterosexual men, infecting and killing millions.

Today, Mr. President, women and children are being impacted by this epidemic at alarming rates. Everyday, 6,300 women worldwide become infected with HIV. In fact, women now represent the fastest growing group of new HIV infections in the United States. AIDS is the fourth leading cause of death among women aged 25 to 44 in this country. Unfortunately, I have seen the devastation that this disease is having on women, as New Jersey has the nation's fourth highest HIV/AIDS infection rate among women, and the second highest infection rate among all adults.

Despite this growing trend, however, M. President, there exists absolutely no HIV or STD prevention method that is within a woman's personal control. Condom use must be negotiated with a partner. We are all aware that for too many women, particularly low-income women in the developing world who rely upon a male partner for economic support, there is no power of negotiation. We know these women are at risk – yet, we expect them to protect themselves without any tools.

M. President, today we have the opportunity to invest in groundbreaking research that can produce these tools, and ultimately, empower women. Microbicides are self-administered products that women could use to prevent transmission of STDs, including HIV/AIDS. I say "could", Mr. President, because due to insufficient research investments, no microbicides have been brought to market. This legislation would encourage federal investments for microbicide research through the establishment of programs at the National Institutes for Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Mr. President, in addition to investing new resources in microbicide research, the Microbicides Development Act will expedite the implementation of the NIH's five-year strategic plan for microbicide research, as well as expand coordination among federal agencies already involved in this research, including NIH, CDC, and the United States Agency on International Development (USAID). The bill also establishes Microbicide Research and Development Teams at the NIH. These teams will bring together public and private scientists and resources to research and develop microbicides for the prevention of HIV and STD infection.

Mr. President, the Microbicides Development Act of 2001 has the potential not only to save millions of lives, but also to save billions in health care costs. Every year, 15 million new HIV and other STD infections occur among Americans aged 15 and older. The direct cost to the U.S. economy of STDs and HIV infection is approximately \$8.4 billion. When the indirect costs, such as lost productivity, are included, that figure rises to an estimated \$20 billion.

Mr. President, while new therapies are being developed to prolong the lives of individuals infected with HIV/AIDS – and we must continue developing new therapies -- only prevention can truly ensure the safety and health of those vulnerable to infection. M. President, if we do not pay a small price now to invest in new prevention methods, we will pay a much higher price later.

Mr. President, federal support for microbicide research is crucial. Numerous small biotechnology companies and university researchers are actively engaged in microbicide research, but they are almost totally dependent on public-sector grants to continue their work and to test their products. Existing public sector grants for microbicides, however, are too small and too short-term to move product leads forward. According to the Alliance for Microbicide Development and other health advocates, in order to bring a microbicide to market within the next five years, current federal investments in microbicide research should be increased to \$75 million this year. The NIH currently invests only \$25 million a year, or one percent of its total HIV/AIDS budget, in such important research.

Mr. President, this legislation will make microbicide research the priority it should be – a priority the Federal government must have if it expects to save the lives of women and their children worldwide, who, twenty years after the first AIDS death, will otherwise become victims of a preventable disease.

Mr. President, in closing, I would like to request that an opinion piece written by United Nations' Secretary General Kofi Annan that appeared in the Washington Post yesterday be included in the Record. In his comments recognizing World AIDS Day, Secretary Annan reiterates the importance of investing in new prevention methods as we continue to fight against AIDS.