

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 28, 2009

The Honorable Susan E. Rice  
Ambassador  
United States Mission to the United Nations  
140 E. 45th Street  
New York, NY 10017

Dear Ambassador Rice:

We wish to congratulate you on your new post. We look forward to working closely with you to address the enormous challenges before us.

Among those challenges, as you well know, is the spread of HIV/AIDS. Within the United States and globally, intravenous drug use has been a significant factor in the spread of HIV and other infections, such as Hepatitis B, that are major threats to public health.

Within the Congress, we three have worked to try to allow federal funding to support domestic needle exchange programs, which have been shown to reduce rates of infection among drug users without increasing illegal drug use. In the United States and around the world, needle exchange is recognized as a practical and proven way to help minimize the terrible harms associated with illegal drug use.

We are pleased that President Obama supports lifting the ban on federal funding for needle exchange, and we look forward to working with the Administration to bolster this critical HIV prevention strategy.

At the same time, we wish to bring to your attention an apparent disconnect in U.S. policy on this important matter, related to the drafting of a United Nations drug policy declaration slated to be released in March in Vienna, Austria. The declaration, coming ten years after the 1998 UN General Assembly Special Session on drug policy, is expected to provide the framework for the next decade of global drug control efforts.

Given that the UN declaration and accompanying "action plan" presently being negotiated are intended to guide policy in this area for years to come, it is crucial to ensure that the approach being taken by the U.S. negotiating team in Vienna will be looked upon favorably by the Obama administration a year from now.

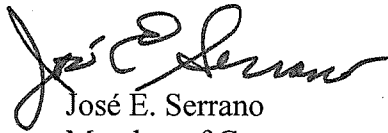
Unfortunately, we understand that the U.S. delegation in Vienna has been actively blocking the efforts of some of our closest allies – including the European Union – to incorporate in the declaration reference to harm reduction measures, such as needle exchange. We find it hard to

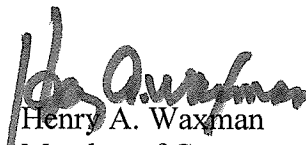
understand how the U.S. delegation could object to language which would not obligate any country to adopt particular policies with which it disagrees.


We are certainly mindful of the numerous pressing issues that face you as you take office. We therefore wanted to bring this important matter to your attention now, so that you and other members of the Administration can resolve this situation in a timely manner. In our view, the U.S. delegation negotiating the declaration in Vienna should immediately be given new instructions from the highest levels of the new Administration. Otherwise, we risk crafting a UN declaration that is at odds with our own national policies and interests, even as we needlessly alienate our nation's allies in Europe.

We appreciate your attention to this urgent matter, and are ready to support and assist your office to ensure that the eventual UN declaration reflects evidence-based policies that protect public health.

Sincerely,

  
José E. Serrano  
Member of Congress

  
Henry A. Waxman  
Member of Congress

  
Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress