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Election 2008 | Black Business Group Criticizes Clinton for Presidential Debate Comments on Federal Funding for HIV/AIDS Programs [Jul 16, 2007]

The [National Black Chamber of Commerce](#) on Friday criticized Sen. [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) (D-N.Y.) for comments she made on federal funding for HIV/AIDS programs and the disease's impact on the black population during a recent Democratic presidential candidate debate, [The Hill](#) reports (Young, *The Hill*, 7/13).

During the 90-minute debate, which took place in June at [Howard University](#) and was moderated by [PBS](#) talk show host Tavis Smiley, Clinton criticized the White House for its response to the increasing rate of HIV cases among black Americans. Clinton said that if HIV/AIDS were the "leading cause of death of white women between the ages of 25 and 34, there would be an outraged outcry in this country." Clinton added that if the issue is not addressed, the U.S. will "never get the services and the public education that [it] need[s]" ([Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report](#), 6/29).

During the debate, Clinton also pledged to increase funding for the [Ryan White Program](#), which provides funding for HIV/AIDS programs in the U.S. "I'm working to raise the budget for Ryan White -- which the Bush administration has kept flat, disgracefully so -- because there are a lot of women particularly who are becoming infected in poor rural areas, as well as underserved urban areas, in states where, frankly, their state governments won't give them medical care," Clinton said.

In a statement issued Friday -- as well as in a letter sent to Clinton and copied to Democratic presidential candidate Sen. [Barack Obama](#) (Ill.) -- NBCC President and CEO Harry Alford accused Clinton of "pandering" to the debate's predominately black audience with her comments on HIV/AIDS. "I found it interesting that [Clinton] chose a presidential debate, held before a largely

African-American audience, to speak out on the fact that HIV/AIDS funding does not fairly reach African-Americans with HIV," Alford wrote, adding, "I only wish [Clinton] had voted the same way last year in the United States Senate, when we really needed" her.

Clinton was one of five senators last year who sought to protect Ryan White funding from being redirected from New York and other urban areas to Southern states and rural areas under the reauthorization of the program. Congress in December passed compromise legislation to increase funding for Southern and rural areas but limited how much federal funding would be redirected from New York and other large states, *The Hill* reports. Clinton voted for the final bill, which President Bush signed into law in December. Clinton's campaign did not immediately comment on the letter, *The Hill* reports (*The Hill*, 7/13).

Video of health-related clips from the candidate debate is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's new online hub on health and the 2008 election, health08.org.

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