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Bill Clinton: Health care reform vital to HIV/AIDS patients

Ex-president speaks to Chicago charity



Former President Bill Clinton takes a question from Yasmin Bates-Brown during Wednesday's fundraiser for the Chicago House. The event raised an estimated \$400,000 for the charity, which helps 1,160 Chicagoans with HIV/AIDS and their family members find housing, medical care and emotional and spiritual support. (Tribune photo by Abel Uribe / November 11, 2009)

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Former [President Bill Clinton](#) said homeless HIV/AIDS patients are in dire need of health care reform in a speech at a benefit Wednesday for the Chicago House & Social Service Agency, a nonprofit providing housing and support for people with [HIV](#) and [AIDS](#).

"There's still an increasing number of homeless people with HIV/AIDS, and a lot of that is because of the health care crisis," he told an audience of about 1,000 donors at the downtown [Palmer House Hilton](#) Hotel.

The event raised an estimated \$400,000 for the charity, which helps 1,160 Chicagoans with HIV/AIDS and their family members find housing, medical care and emotional and spiritual support.

The homeless are three to nine times more likely to have HIV or AIDS than people with stable housing, according to a 2004 study by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. In his speech, Clinton attributed this fact to the high cost of medications and treatments and said public health care could curb homelessness for those with the virus.

Health care reform is not only morally right, but because reform would encourage preventive care, it would save money in the long run, Clinton said.

"The government will have to provide a health care program not just to be as healthy (as other countries) but also to be economically competitive," he said.

The Rev. Stan Sloan, CEO of Chicago House, said the former president was his first choice to speak at the benefit because he started the Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative, which helps developing countries provide treatment and prevention. Clinton's work overseas mirrors Chicago House's work here, Sloan said.

"We hope you leave here inspired," Sloan said.

Clinton closed his talk with a story about a 15-year-old HIV-positive boy in Rwanda whose parents already had died of AIDS. The Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative built him and his sister a new home. Clinton knelt down to talk to the boy, who had only made it to the third grade because of his illness.

"I said: 'I hope you're not discouraged to go to school,' " he said.

The boy earnestly replied "no," that he planned to study hard, go to medical school and become a doctor to help other sick children.

"We've got to create a world of positive interdependence," Clinton said. "We're in this together."

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