On Sunday, March 20, I participated in the third annual Florida AIDS Walk in Fort Lauderdale along with thousands of Floridians from across the State. I would like to thank my fellow walkers, as well as donors and sponsors of the event for making this year's Florida AIDS Walk a tremendous success. Their dedication to raising HIV/AIDS awareness, linking individuals to care, and reversing the tide of new infections is truly inspirational.

Presented by the AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) Pharmacy, the 10-kilometer walk raised $640,000 to fight HIV/AIDS in Florida, well over their goal of $500,000. All monies raised will help AHF, Broward House, SunServe, the Pride Center at Equality Park, and Women in

Network provide prevention education, HIV testing, and treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties.

This year, event organizers sought to bring particular attention to the fact that over 167,000 Floridians are living with HIV/AIDS. South Florida has the highest rate of new infections in the country, which are concentrated in parts of my district in Palm Beach and Broward Counties, and the State as a whole has the third-highest HIV/AIDS population nationwide.

Florida's HIV/AIDS crisis is further exacerbated by the ongoing shortfall in AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) funding. According to the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD), there are currently 7,553 individuals on ADAP "waiting lists" in 11 states. Alarmingly, Florida accounts for the majority of these cases with 3,848 individuals on the list. To make matters worse, thousands more have also been denied program eligibility due to service cuts.

Ensuring access to treatment remains key to combating HIV/AIDS. In fact, antiretroviral drugs can increase the life expectancy of a person living with HIV/AIDS by at least 24 years and help reduce the spread of HIV by up to 92 percent.

Currently, I am working together with my fellow colleagues from Florida, Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Congressman Deutch, and Congresswoman Frederica Wilson, to ensure that increased ADAP funding for the remainder of FY 2011 is included in the final long-term funding vehicle passed by Congress.

We can and must do better. If we can create a no-fly zone in Libya, we should be able to make a "no-AIDS zone" here in the United States.