There is overwhelming evidence that syringe exchange programs when implemented as part of a comprehensive prevention strategy are an effective public health intervention for reducing HIV/AIDS and hepatitis and do not promote drug use.

Now let me be clear. I detest illegal drug use. I think it constitutes a national security threat. It ruins lives. It causes crime. It gets us into war against drugs in Colombia and Mexico; and in fact, it gets us into another war in Afghanistan because of poppy production. So I hate illegal drugs. But even more, I hate the spread of AIDS. There’s overwhelming evidence that we can help stop the spread of AIDS by allowing needle exchange programs. They are endorsed by leading public health organizations, such as the Institute of Medicine, the World Health Organization, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Nurses Association, the American Public Health Association, the American Public Health Association. They are endorsed by people such as Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Nation’s leading fighter against AIDS; Thomas Frieden; former NIH Director Harold Varmus; former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop and David Satcher, who served under Republican administrations. They are endorsed by people such as Captain Andrea Anderson from the Los Angeles Police Department; Atlantic City Deputy Chief of Police Robert Schwartz; and San Francisco Chief of Police Frederick Lau.

Let me make one other point. Every Member of Congress has access to decent primary health care; but we are going to put at risk a substantial number of people if we do not support this underlying committee amendment. I want to say something personal. If we lose this amendment, it is not going to be because a lot of people on this House floor really believe that this ban makes sense. It will be because many Members are concerned and fear a cheap-shot political 30-second ad that distorts their position, springs half-truths and scares people. I understand that concern.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. OBEY. I yield myself additional minutes.

But for the good of the country, we are being paid to ignore that kind of pressure and simply do the right thing for the country. I ask every Member of the House to do the right thing because if you do, it will save lives. I ask them to vote “no” on the amendment.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Chair, I rise to oppose the Souder amendment, which prohibits funding needle exchange programs. Needle exchange programs are effective at preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

There are over 1 million Americans living with HIV/AIDS in the United States today, and over 20 percent of them do not know they are infected. Every 9 1/2 minutes, another person is infected with HIV. Last fall, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new estimates of HIV infection in the United States, which indicate that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is even worse than previously thought. These estimates indicate that approximately 56,300 new HIV infections occurred in the United States in 2006. This figure is approximately 40 percent higher than CDC’s previous estimates of 40,000 new infections per year.

According to the CDC, 13 percent of new HIV infections in the United States occur among intravenous drug users. Needle exchange programs are an effective means of preventing HIV transmission among this population. Needle exchange programs save lives, reduce health care costs, and link intravenous drug users with substance abuse treatment programs that could end their addiction and allow them to live healthy and productive lives.

The Souder amendment is opposed by AIDS Action, the HIV Medicine Association, the AIDS Institute, and several other organizations concerned about the spread of HIV/AIDS in our communities.

I urge my colleagues to oppose the Souder amendment.

Mr. OBEY. I yield back the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. SOUDER).

The Souder amendment is opposed by AIDS Action, the HIV Medicine Association, the AIDS Institute, and several other organizations concerned about the spread of HIV/AIDS in our communities.

I urge my colleagues to oppose the Souder amendment.

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The CHAIR. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. SOUDER).

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