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[ARTICLE]

AIDS Group Interrupts Speech, Seeks Policy Outline

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Students representing AIDS awareness campus groups made a national splash today, interrupting Senator John Edwards' (D-N.C.) campaign speech and demanding that the presidential candidate propose policies to deal with the worldwide disease.

Hearts stopped in Roone Arledge Auditorium when 15 students in red t-shirts stood suddenly as Edwards spoke about his career as a trial lawyer. But they were not there to attack the candidate—only to make a statement: "Campaign for AIDS!" they shouted in unison.

Edwards, unflustered, thanked the students for speaking out, calling fighting AIDS a "moral issue." He promised to return later in his speech to the topic, but did not.

"I wasn't that impressed with how Edwards responded to us. He should have given us a little bit more time," said Kim Sue, CC '06 and the president of Columbia Global Justice.

The 15 students represented Columbia Global Justice, an undergraduate group, and two graduate groups: the Columbia AIDS Action Network at the School of International and Public Affairs and the Global Health Forum at the Mailman School of Public Health. When members of the various groups discovered that they were all planning to attend the event, they decided to wear the red AIDS t-shirts and organized a timed action. A few were lucky enough to be seated behind Edwards in view of the cameras, providing the group maximum visibility.

"It was the only way we could get everyone to listen to us," said Eli Mather, CC '04 and a CGJ member. The cable Fox News Network and local news stations have all run stories about the AIDS speak-out.

"It's really important that AIDS become an issue for these presidential candidates. Whenever they come to New York, we're going to be there," Sue said.

Edwards has not been outspoken about AIDS on the campaign trail, but includes fighting AIDS as part of his vision for U.S. foreign policy in his key policy document, *Real Solutions for America*.

By contrast, Senator John Kerry (D-Mass.) has made fighting "AIDS on a global basis" a top talking point in foreign policy and a key part of his critique of the Bush administration. He was the only candidate to

address AIDS at the most recent debate in Wisconsin, doing so twice. Sue said she planned to vote for him in New York's primary.

The Bush administration pledged money to fight the disease in 2003, but both candidates have been skeptical of the president's budget allocation. Internationally, nearly nine million people died from AIDS in 2003, mostly in Africa.

Kerry's platform includes \$30 billion in aid by 2008, the target set by the World Health Organization as a "fair share of the cost." In a statement on World AIDS Day, Edwards said he supported the WHO's goal of providing treatment, but did not cite a spending target.

"Edwards didn't give any specifics like that," said Jonathan Jacoby, SIPA/Business '06.