

BETTY McCOLLUM  
4TH DISTRICT, MINNESOTA



COMMITTEE ON  
EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

[www.house.gov/mccollum](http://www.house.gov/mccollum)

1029 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-6631  
FAX: (202) 225-1968

165 WESTERN AVENUE NORTH  
SUITE 17  
ST. PAUL, MN 55102  
(651) 224-9191  
FAX: (651) 224-3056

UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**Congresswoman Betty McCollum**  
**International Women's Day Press Conference in Support of H.R. 4188**  
**Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice**  
**March 8, 2006**

Good morning.

Thank you, Rev. Ivory, for your introduction and your support.

I am very pleased to be here with distinguished members of the clergy and my friend and Minnesota colleague, Congressman Jim Ramstad. Jim is a champion for women's health issues and I am very proud to have him as an original cosponsor of this bill.

Today is International Women's Day, a day to celebrate the lives of our sisters both here in the United States and around the world.

And, as we celebrate, let us remember the millions of our sisters in the developing world who are healthy and alive because they and their husbands have had access to a very simple, low cost health intervention – voluntary family planning.

I am here today to call upon my colleagues in Congress to co-sponsor and work to pass bipartisan legislation that Congressman Ramstad and I have introduced.

H.R. 4188, the *Focus on Family Health Worldwide Act*, works to strengthen the U.S. commitment to voluntary international family planning.

This legislation calls for U.S. assistance to international family planning in the world's poorest countries to be increased from \$436 million in 2006 to \$600 million in 2007. The bill calls for strengthening core family planning services, training healthcare workers, ensuring a constant supply of contraceptives to countries with the greatest needs, and integrating family planning with HIV/AIDS interventions.

The goal is simple – provide couples in the world's poorest countries the ability to space their children and give mothers the opportunity to stay healthy, productive and alive.

This bill should be considered a line in the sand for members of Congress and voters. I say this because I want to be very clear – this bill is about healthy women and healthy families and not about abortion or abortion politics. We must not allow domestic abortion politics to become an excuse for politicians to deny poor women around the

world access to voluntary family planning. I am proud that we have both pro-choice and pro-life co-sponsors to this legislation.

If Members of Congress cannot support H.R. 4188 it is because they do not support voluntary family planning and their constituents – especially the women they represent – need to know this.

There also must be a sense of urgency about this bill because the U.S. commitment to family planning is at risk. President Bush proposed dramatic and dangerous cuts to international family planning in his 2007 budget. This year's funding level of \$436 million is proposed to be cut to \$357 million – a \$77 million, or 18%, cut to the world's poorest women.

This will quite simply mean, in the starkest terms, that more women will suffer and face the terror of dying a preventable death.

Keeping poor women alive is not to be taken lightly. Over 530,000 women around the world die every year from pregnancy related causes. Voluntary family planning is a low-cost, highly effective health intervention that helps make motherhood safer, saves women's lives of women and contributes to healthier children.

International family planning is a popular and critically important component of bilateral U.S. foreign assistance to the world's poorest countries and Congress needs to

The religious leaders here today, along with Congressman Ramstad and I have the same goal in mind, healthy women, healthy children and healthy families.

H.R. 4188 is a strategic, long-term development investment in the lives of women, couples and the future of the world's poorest countries – And, I strongly encourage my colleagues to support it.

Again, I am very proud of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice's support for women around the world and their support for this bill.

Jim, thank you for your support and leadership.

Together, let's not only celebrate women, let's invest to keep them healthy, productive and alive.