

# THE NEWS TRIBUNE

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## Rep. Smith has a new crusade

By Les Blumenthal

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. Adam Smith won't be in Scotland this week for the summit of the world's most powerful leaders, and he didn't chill with rock stars at the Live 8 concerts over the weekend.

But in his own way, the Tacoma Democrat also is engaged in the struggle to eradicate extreme global poverty.

Smith, a member of the House International Relations Committee, will introduce legislation in coming weeks requiring the White House to make global poverty a top U.S. foreign policy priority and come up with a comprehensive plan to eliminate it.

In making his case, Smith can rattle off a string of statistics: 2.7 billion people struggling to survive on less than \$2 a day, 1.1 billion people living on less than a \$1 a day, and malnutrition and preventable diseases taking the lives of 17 million children every year.

He acknowledges there are no "snap-of-the-fingers" solutions. But he says the U.S. has a moral obligation to improve the lives of the world's poorest people. And, he adds, it would also enhance America's reputation abroad, improve global security and create additional economic markets.

"One 11-year-old boy goes missing for four days in the mountains of Utah and this nation is obsessed," Smith said. "If you can generate that

type of concern for one boy, how about the hundreds of millions around the world in worse condition?"

Smith became energized on the issue when he confronted it during a January 2004 trip to Honduras with Seattle philanthropist Bill Clapp, one of the founders of the Initiative for Global Development.

Clapp and other business and civic leaders from the area – including former Gov. Dan Evans, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. John Shalikashvili, former EPA Administrator Bill Ruckelshaus and prominent attorney Bill Gates Sr. – founded the group several years ago. They contend the elimination of extreme poverty is as important to global security and prosperity as stamping out terrorism.

Beyond the Seattle organization, the group now has chapters in such cities as Minneapolis, Minn.; New York; Portland; San Francisco; Tampa, Fla.; and Indianapolis.

For Smith, what he saw in Honduras and what he learned later at a forum in Japan on trade and poverty convinced him the U.S. needs to work much harder.

"If you are walking down the street and there is a child about to die, do you give them a drink of water?" Smith said in an interview. "We are supposed to be a nation of faith, a Christian nation. But billions of people are suffering. It's terrible."

Washington state has become somewhat of an epicenter for private groups focused on combating world poverty. Clapp said there are at least 35 such organization in the Puget Sound region, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and faith-based groups such as World Vision International in Federal Way.

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## **Rep. Smith has a new crusade** *continued*

“This issue has been building for four or five years,” Clapp said. “We’ve been distracted by other things, but global poverty is the underlying issue that has to be wrestled to the ground. It won’t go away.”

While other members of the state’s congressional delegation have been supportive of his group’s efforts, Clapp said Smith has emerged as a leader on the issue.

“He is a thoughtful person who was visibly moved by our trip to Honduras,” Clapp said. “I don’t expect it to be easy for him. Congress is divided and has a lot of other things on its mind, including the budget problems. But there is never a good time for this.”

Smith and Clapp both say President Bush has shown an increasing interest in global poverty, but would like him to become even more engaged. On Thursday, Bush proposed that the U.S. spend \$1.2 billion to try to cut malaria deaths in Africa in half in the next five years.

Bush has also proposed doubling U.S. spending to \$400 million to promote education for girls in Africa. And, though he has refused to back British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s call for a doubling of aid to Africa, Bush said he supports \$674 million in African famine relief.

The topic of poverty, especially in Africa, is expected to be a prime topic of discussion when Bush meets with seven other world leaders in Scotland during the Group of Eight summit. Clapp’s organization ran ads in several East Coast papers last week urging Bush and the other leaders to do even more.

Though Smith wished the so-called G-8 summit would focus on global poverty rather than just the problems in Africa, 23 of the 25 poorest nations are in Africa.

“Increasingly global leaders are starting to focus on the poverty issue,” Smith said.

As for the attention on world poverty brought by rock stars at the Live 8 concerts, Smith said there was no question it helps.

“There are more people who know Bono than Blair,” he said, referring to the lead singer of the rock band U2.

Even so, Smith said politicians don’t spend enough time working on the poverty issue.

“We get elected on kitchen-table issues,” he said.

But Smith said global poverty is a security issue for the U.S. because the poor can be “susceptible to radical philosophies” that can cause unrest and terrorism.

On the economic side, Smith said lifting billions people out of extreme poverty could stimulate the global economy and create more international trade.

### **SEVEN FACTS ON GLOBAL POVERTY**

- Every year, 6 million children die from malnutrition before their fifth birthday.
- Every year, 11 million children die from preventable diseases such as malaria or pneumonia.
- Over 1 billion people use unsafe sources of drinking water.
- More than 2.6 billion people – more than 40 percent of the world’s population – lack basic sanitation.
- In some of the world’s poorest countries, less than half of the children are in primary school and less than 20 percent attend secondary school.
- More than 1.1 billion people live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$1 a day.
- Another 2.7 billion people live on less than \$2 per day.

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