

Press Release

June 27, 2006

**SCHAKOWSKY ANNOUNCES OPPOSITION TO U.S.-OMAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT**

**JOINS COLLEAGUES AND OVER 400 ORGANIZATIONS TO DENOUNCE FLAWED PROPOSAL**

**WASHINGTON, DC -- U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today joined fellow members of Congress and representatives of over 400 organizations in announcing strong opposition to the proposed U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement (OFTA). The Bush Administration requested implementing legislation for the agreement this week and congressional votes are expected as soon as July. Congresswoman Schakowsky's full statement, as prepared for deliver, follows:**

**I want to thank Congressman Michaud and Congresswoman Linda Sanchez and our allies from so many important organizations, including organized labor, who make up the Citizens Trade Campaign, for their leadership on this critical issue. As a UNITE HERE! member and as a member of Congress, I am proud to stand with you today in opposition to the proposed U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement (OFTA).**

**The Bush Administration and Congressional Republicans are again trying to force passage of a trade agreement that willfully lacks adequate and enforceable labor standards. Democrats have called for such standards in every agreement negotiated by this administration. And each time, we have been disappointed.**

**And this week, in sending OFTA to the Hill for approval, the President has opted to send Congress an agreement in which he refused to include a prohibition on forced or slave labor. That is not our idea of spreading Democracy. And it is not how the U.S. best improves lives in the Middle East and therefore our own security interests.**

**We have seen the effects of trade agreements that are weak on worker rights. We have seen the misguided policies and unfortunate impacts of NAFTA and CAFTA and we know they will be repeated with the OFTA.**

**Nothing has changed except the geography.**

**In a country like Oman, where meager rights for workers fall well below the ILO standards, where the Sultan can change any law by decree, and where there are NO independent unions, Congress should be especially vigilant. We must ensure that any trade agreement with Oman or any country contains hard and fast labor standards. The Oman FTA does not. And we are not willing to sign off on this agreement based on unenforceable promises from Oman or an Administration that has proven to be more interested in the rights of capital than in human and labor rights.**

**This agreement's supporters claim that it will encourage development and spread democracy throughout the Middle East. It won't.**

**We know the truth. Those of us in this room, our colleagues in the Congress, and the over 400 wise and experienced organizations who have joined in opposition to OFTA today, have learned from our country's mistakes on trade.**

**Like our trade agreement with Jordan, the Oman FTA will only further normalize poor labor conditions in the Middle East, hurting the hard-working men and women who need our help. A U.S. endorsement of poor labor conditions in Oman will only foster hate and distrust of the United States at a time when we all agree we should be building bridges, not burning them.**

**Democracy and development might go hand-in-hand, but both need to reach the masses to succeed.**

**If we do not provide enforceable and REAL protections for workers, the Oman FTA will make matters worse for Omanis and worse for American workers.**

**Thank you.**

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