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SCHAKOWSKY CRITICIZES BUSH ADMINISTRATION FOR WAITING SIX YEARS TO CONSIDER MAKING CARS MORE FUEL EFFICIENT

SAYS IT TOOK DOUBLED GAS PRICES AND AN ENERGY CRISIS FOR THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION TO REQUEST AUTHORITY TO ACT

WASHINGTON, DC -- U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, today criticized the Bush Administration for waiting six years before asking Congress for the authority to make automobiles more fuel efficient at a hearing on fuel economy standards before the full Committee. Representative Schakowsky also called on the Administration to take more immediate action to lower gas prices.

Representative Schakowsky's opening statement is below:

We should have held this hearing six years ago when the President took office. Instead, the Republican Congress has rubberstamped the Bush Administration's energy policies, which has helped the oil and gas companies earn record profits as they raise gasoline prices to record levels.

I just came from Chicago, where my constituents are paying nearly \$3.00 for a gallon of regular gasoline. It is no wonder that gasoline prices have gone up - this Committee passed an energy bill that the EIA said would raise prices. It did.

The Bush Administration has now launched a PR campaign to distance itself from the energy crisis it created. In his "more of the same" campaign, President Bush recently announced a series of energy policies that were already happening.

Both last year's Energy Policy Act and Science, State, Justice and Commerce Act directed the FTC to investigate for price gouging. This Committee is expecting that report within the month. Ignoring that action, last week, President Bush directed his Administration to investigate for price gouging. However, even after issuing this direction on Tuesday, three days later the President said that his "inclination and instincts" assure him that there's no "rip off taking place." Quick investigation.

Now, the Bush Administration is asking Congress to grant it authority it already has. If President Bush was willing, NHTSA could today raise fuel economy standards for passenger cars. We should be debating how quickly and at what level the Bush Administration should raise CAFE standards for passenger cars. If the Administration raised CAFE standards to 33 miles per gallon and helped the auto manufacturers reach that goal, we would save over 2.5 million barrels of oil each day, eliminating our need for Persian Gulf oil. Today we find out that the Bush Administration did not believe it had the authority to raise CAFE standards for passenger cars - but it took six years to request the authority to act.

President Bush is dragging his feet. There are several ways to keep gas prices down in the short-term: holding individual oil and gas companies that price gouge accountable, and ensuring that oil companies do not make windfall profits off of the backs of consumers.

The American people cannot afford to pay \$400 million to fund the golden parachutes of oil executives. These record gasoline prices go far beyond supply and demand - consumers are being exploited at the pump. Oil prices are up \$30 from one year ago, even though the crude oil supply is at a five year high.

A comprehensive energy strategy to reduce gasoline prices must include efficiency and conservation. President Bush has cut funding for major efficiency programs in his FY07 budget including weatherization, EnergyStar, and the Clean Cities program. The President's commitment to efficiency should be judged by his deeds, not by his words.