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**SCHAKOWSKY AND VELAZQUEZ, UNITE HERE, MILITARY APPAREL WORKERS
RELEASE REPORT UNCOVERING SWEATSHOPS IN THE U.S. MILITARY UNIFORM
INDUSTRY**

WASHINGTON, DC -- At a press conference today, UNITE HERE released "Conduct Unbecoming: Sweatshops and the U.S. Military Uniform Industry," documenting poor working conditions in factories that make uniforms for the armed forces. The report finds that uniforms for our country's enlisted men and women are often sewn in domestic sweatshops with conditions more like what people expect to see overseas than here in the United States.

"Conduct Unbecoming" is the result of extensive research and interviews with workers. The report uncovers a host of abuses at government contractors including poverty-level wages, unaffordable health care, and violations of health and safety standards, among others. UNITE HERE President Bruce Raynor, introducing the workers present at the conference, noted that they face the some of the worst conditions in the garment industry. "Workers are justifiably proud of the fact that they make uniforms for U.S. service men and women," explained President Raynor. "But these irresponsible contractors, who are taking taxpayers money and exploiting workers for their own profits, do a dishonor to the uniforms they provide. Our troops deserve a uniform that was made in conditions they can be proud of."

"Instead of promoting jobs which provide fair wages and benefits, the Bush Administration is using taxpayer dollars to sustain sweatshop working conditions in the United States," Rep. Schakowsky stated. "This report demonstrates that the Administration is yet again putting the profits of its corporate cronies before the needs of working families. We must fill this accountability black hole by requiring that contractors abide by a sweatshop-free code of conduct and by instituting regular inspections. Corporations that invest in their workers, not those that exploit them, should be awarded federal contracts," Rep. Schakowsky concluded.

The study also finds that taxpayers bear the burden of paying irresponsible uniform suppliers in more ways than one. Because of low pay and unaffordable benefits, workers in this industry are forced to rely on state and federally-subsidized programs to feed

their children and make ends meet. At the event Lois McMillan, a worker from American Power Source in Mississippi, told the audience that she is dependent on such programs. "The government is always saying that people should get off government assistance and move out of public housing," McMillan testified. "And here it is we make six dollars an hour. Six dollars with a family of four-what is that? Nothing."

The report explains how low-bid contract awards by the Department of Defense, the world's largest purchaser of U.S.-made apparel, contribute to poor conditions in the industry, which employs 20,000 men and women. This practice encourages companies to cut corners at the expense of workers.

Reputable contractors who provide benefits, safe working conditions, and better wages are routinely underbid by this competition, explained UNITE HERE Executive Vice President Edgar Romney. "There are honest contractors out there, contractors who pay decent wages and treat their workers with dignity and respect," he said. "Why are these companies struggling to get contracts from the government?"

The report suggests that with better oversight and accountability of contractors, sweatshops can be eliminated from the military uniform supply chain. It recommends that contractors follow a code of conduct and be required to disclose in contract bid their wages, health and pension benefits, and any violations of health and safety or other laws. In this way, the Pentagon can help raise standards in this industry, guarantee that uniforms are made under safe working conditions, and make the highest quality uniforms for our armed forces.

Rep. Velzquez reaffirmed that there is no place for sweatshop jobs in our country. "Hard-working Americans, struggling to make ends meet and provide for their families, should be provided with livable wages, consistent pay levels, and access to quality health care-and they should perform their jobs in a safe environment, free from intimidation, harassment or discrimination."

UNITE HERE represents 450,000 workers in the garment, textile, laundry, retail, hospitality, and gaming industries throughout the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico.