

**March 9, 2006**

**SCHAKOWSKY PRESSES BODMAN ON HIGH NATURAL GAS PRICES, NUCLEAR INCIDENTS IN ILLINOIS**

WASHINGTON, DC -- U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, today questioned Secretary of Energy Bodman about the record high natural gas prices facing Illinoisans, as well as the Administration's attempt to expand the nuclear power industry despite recent public health emergencies at Exelon plants in Illinois.

Below is Schakowsky's statement from the Energy and Commerce Committee's hearing on the Bush Administration's FY2007 energy budget:

Despite unusually warm temperatures, the average Midwestern consumer paid 25% more to heat their homes this winter. Yesterday, the Midwestern Attorneys General Natural Gas Working Group released a report demonstrating that this rise in prices was not caused by simple supply and demand factors - instead, a lack of oversight, wild speculation on the futures market, and price gouging were responsible for the wellhead price of natural gas to increase over \$400 billion from 2000 - 2005. This Administration has done nothing to bring those prices down, and I don't see anything in its budget which would do so.

The President's FY2007 energy budget is a slap in the face to the low and middle income families who struggled to pay their bills this winter and could face even higher bills and colder weather next winter. The budget funds LIHEAP at a level that is at least \$2.3 billion under what this committee authorized in the Energy Policy Act, cuts millions of dollars from critical efficiency programs like weatherization assistance and EnergyStar, and increases funding for renewable energy programs by only 0.2%. This budget shows that the President's State of the Union commitment to end America's addiction to oil was nothing but an empty promise.

Most inexplicably, this budget invests hundreds of millions of dollars in new nuclear infrastructure and dangerous, expensive programs like reprocessing which could divert resources from nuclear waste clean-up. It will be hard to justify this nuclear expansion to the residents of Illinois, who were informed in February that two Illinois plants spilled radioactive, cancer-causing tritium between 1996 - 2003. Expanding the nuclear industry is a recipe for a public health disaster.

Families across the Midwest, whose wallets were stretched by the most expensive winter on record, should expect more from their Administration.