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SCHAKOWSKY CALLS FOR TOUGH LEGISLATION TO PROTECT AMERICANS FROM TOXIC POLLUTANTS

WASHINGTON, DC -- U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky today urged her colleagues to support passage of a new law to regulate Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) - toxic airborne chemicals - to protect public health.

Representative Schakowsky's full statement is below:

For quite some time the international community has recognized the threat that Persistent Organic Pollutants, which are commonly referred to as POPs, pose to public health and the environment. POPs are exceedingly toxic chemicals that may take years to break down in the environment and can travel long distances. The use of these chemicals anywhere around the world is a threat to the health of our nation. Effectively protecting the public health from POPs is only possible through international agreements. Congress has a duty to amend our laws so that the U.S. can be an active partner in international efforts to protect the public and the environment from these hazards.

As we all know, the Stockholm POPs Convention, which entered into force on May 17, 2004, would ban or severely restrict the production, use, trade, and disposal of 12 of the most dangerous POPs. Unfortunately the Convention has yet to be ratified by the U.S. Senate. The two bills before us today, H.R. 4591 introduced by Chairman Gilmore, and H.R. 4800 introduced by Ranking Member Solis, aim to make necessary changes to existing law so that the United States will be in compliance with the Stockholm convention once it is ratified.

I am concerned, however, that the language drafted by the Chairman will make it difficult to regulate POPs in the United States. H.R. 4591 seems to have been designed to preempt states' authority to regulate substances that become subject to the treaty. Also, H.R. 4591 sets a new cost-benefit standard that must be met before the U.S. can regulate a newly-listed POP. It is my feeling that the EPA will never be able to regulate such a cost-benefit standard, therefore making it impossible to protect us from additional pollutants. In addition, I am concerned that the bill lacks strong enough language to force a timely implementation of a POPs Convention decision.

The Stockholm Convention sets a good precedent for international action and cooperation between all of the stake holders in the interest of public health and the environment. I believe

that H.R. 4800 presents a solution that is properly aligned within the Stockholm Convention's framework.