

AUGUST 15, 2005

SCHAKOWSKY COMMEMORATES 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF SOCIAL SECURITY

REAFFIRMS SUPPORT FOR PRESERVING RETIREMENT, DISABILITY SECURITY PROGRAM AGAINST EFFORTS TO PRIVATIZE IT

CHICAGO, IL - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky today joined advocates for seniors and workers at a press conference commemorating the 70th Anniversary of Social Security. The press conference took place at Roosevelt University, named after President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who signed Social Security into law 70 years ago this week. This anniversary comes at a critical time for Social Security, as President Bush and Congressional Republicans have introduced plans to privatize this landmark program on which millions of seniors and disabled workers rely.

Excerpts from Representative Schakowsky's remarks are below:

"It is wonderful to be here today at Roosevelt University to celebrate the remarkable event that took place 70 years ago - the passage of the Social Security Act. All across the country, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, children, and survivors are holding similar celebrations. Whether you are currently getting Social Security benefits, have gotten dependent benefits in the past or will get benefits in the future, it is time to have some cake and toast what FDR called 'a splendid justification of the vitality of representative government.'"

"Only the Bush Administration has decided to downplay the 70th birthday of Social Security. Administration spokespeople said that this isn't a big birthday, it is not significant, it is not deserving of recognition. Of course, those who want to destroy Social Security are unlikely to want to celebrate it. But for the rest of us, every year is the right year to honor Social Security."

"For many of us, it is hard to understand what it was like before Social Security. In 1935, FDR sent to Congress and the nation the Committee of Economic Security's report on the Need for Security . . . The Committee on Economic Security provided evidence that millions of senior citizens were faced with that tragedy. Senior citizens were living in almshouses. In some states, more than 1 in 3 senior citizens had no income whatsoever. Many who had saved for their retirement lost everything in the Wall Street crash and could not turn to family members who were unemployed and without income themselves. . ."

"The Committee on Economic Security concluded, 'The one almost all-embracing measure of security is an assured income. A program of economic security, as we envision it, must have as its primary aim the assurance of an adequate income to each human being in childhood, youth, middle age or old age - in sickness or in health. It must provide safeguards against all of the hazards leading to destitution and dependence. The result was Social Security . . ."

"Today, on its 70th birthday, we should take time to look back at what it was like before Social Security, just as we look at the many benefits it provides today. Social Security is the sole source of income for 22 percent of senior citizens, and it provides the majority of income for 2 out of every 3 seniors. Without Social Security, 13 million older Americans would live in poverty. Social Security does more to reduce poverty among children than any other public program except for the Earned Income Tax Credit. Without Social Security, 1 million children would live in poverty."

"Social Security provides economic security for disabled workers and their families. The Social Security Administration estimates that 1 in 3 young workers will become disabled before reaching retirement age. Without the Social Security disability insurance, many of them, too, would live in poverty. Social Security provides the economic and national security that FDR envisioned seventy years ago: a guaranteed, inflation-adjusted lifetime benefit for retirement, the equivalent of a \$400,000 survivors' policy and a \$353,000 disability insurance policy for every working family."

"At a time of wide swings in the stock market, terminations of pension plans, and corporate wrongdoers like Enron, the rock solid nature of Social Security provides a much-needed guarantee of assurance . . ."

"FDR said that 'The idea of Social Security, which some reactionaries used to label as alien to the American tradition, has become so firmly rooted here in America that business, labor, finance and all political parties now accept it as a permanent solution.' FDR, I wish that were true."

"We don't have the details of their legislation. We don't know when they will call for a vote. But we do know that the Bush Administration and Republican leadership are deadly serious about pushing the ownership society which our great Senator Dick Durbin describes as the 'we're all in it - alone' society. Even though the American public opposes privatization - and the more they hear, the less they approve - we cannot rest because our opponents are not giving up. "

"Privatizers keep coming up with new variations on their theme in an attempt to put a new veneer on a bad product - but every new proposal is more of the same: the diversion of Social Security revenues to create private accounts means drastic cuts in benefits or raising the age of eligibility, making Social Security's finances more precarious, and increasing the deficit for decades to come."

"There were privatizers around when Social Security was created. During the Senate debate in 1935, Kentucky Senator Alben Barkley responded to them this way. 'Abraham Lincoln once said this country cannot endure half slave and half free. I do not believe any old-age pension system we may inaugurate can long endure half public and half private. My contention is that we cannot safely take away from this uniform, universal system which we are trying to establish here the universality and the uniformity of its application by holding out an invitation or an encouragement to private individuals to impinge upon the system set up by the Federal Government, and utterly to destroy its reserve fund..' Senator Barkley was right in 1935 and we are right today. And, just as he and FDR were successful in seventy years ago in creating this great treasure of America, we will be successful today in keeping it safe for generations to come."