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**SCHAKOWSKY DEMANDS ANSWERS FROM FDA ON ILLINOIS' REQUEST TO PURCHASE FLU VACCINE FROM ABROAD**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - During a joint hearing of the Oversight and Investigations and the Health Subcommittees, U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today demanded answers from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on Illinois' request to purchase flu vaccines from abroad. FDA officials announced at the hearing that they "should have a decision very soon."

"Thanks to Governor Blagojevich, Illinois has undertaken efforts to secure additional vaccine supplies for the most vulnerable populations in our state and is awaiting FDA authorization for those efforts. We must have an answer as quickly as possible because lives are at stake," Schakowsky said during the hearing.

"Since we are clearly relying on foreign sources to meet our flu vaccine needs, why is the Bush Administration blocking re-importation of other life-saving medicines, an initiative championed by Illinois' governor and Democrats on Capitol Hill," she asked.

Schakowsky continued, "Price gougers appeared out of the woodwork to profit from a public health crisis. None of those problems occurred in other countries where the government plays a far greater role in assuring affordable access to health care - in fact Canada had enough flu vaccine supply to sell to those Americans close enough to get it."

Schakowsky said she was disturbed after reading a report today which stated that the FDA ".found serious problems of bacterial contamination at an influenza vaccine plant in England in 2003, 16 months before British regulators effectively closed the site and impounded its flu shots because of fears they were tainted." ( [Washington Post](#) , 11/18/04)

"There is no question that had FDA taken an appropriate course of action, this year's vaccine shortage and perhaps unnecessary sickness and loss of lives in the U.S. may have been avoided," Schakowsky said.

Schakowsky questioned the Bush Administration's attitude towards vaccine accessibility. "I was disturbed by Vice President Cheney's explanation that vaccine production just isn't profitable enough for private companies. Are concerns for the high profits of the pharmaceutical companies to take precedence over the health of the American people?" she said.

Millions of Americans suffer from the Flu each year. Hundreds of thousands are

**hospitalized and over 30,000 individuals die from the virus**