

DECEMBER 9, 2003

**SCHAKOWSKY: BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S MISSTATEMENT OF THE DAY -  
SUPPORT FOR TROOPS IN IRAQ WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) issued today's "Bush Administration's Misstatement of the Day" on the failure of the Administration to provide enough body armor for the troops in Iraq.**

□ White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card said on CNN (12/7/03):

*"we've got tremendous men and women wearing the uniform of the United States fighting to beat back terrorists and to secure the hopes and dreams of the Iraqi people."*

However, while the Administration claims to support the troops serving in Iraq, today's Chicago Tribune editorial asks why the Bush Administration has failed to provide soldiers with a critical piece of equipment that could save their life -- up-to-date Interceptor body armor:

*How could a government that spends as much on defense as the rest of the world combined fail to allocate enough money for something so basic and critical as this?*  
(Chicago Tribune, 12/9/03)

Chinks in our armor  
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When you enlist in the Army, you can expect to be provided with everything you need to do your job. Uniform? Check. Rifle? Check. Boots? Check. Helmet? Check. But when it comes to one of the most vital items of equipment, foot soldiers braving enemy fire are sometimes left to fend for themselves. In Iraq, the U.S. Army doesn't have enough up-to-date Interceptor body armor to go around.

This is a failure on the part of the Pentagon that is hard to comprehend. The military now has lightweight Kevlar vests reinforced by boron carbide ceramic plates that will stop an AK-47 round cold. They're the main reason a lot of soldiers hit by enemy fire have survived bullets and shrapnel that would have been fatal in past wars. "There have been dozens and dozens of instances where body armor has saved lives of individual soldiers," an Army expert has said.

Yet some soldiers serving in what is still a combat zone have been issued old-fashioned flak jackets that can easily be punctured by an AK-47 bullet. Lacking sufficient supplies, the Army provided modern vests only to combat soldiers, leaving many support personnel vulnerable.

**That was nearly nine months ago. Yet amazingly, some of the men and women placed in harm's way in Iraq still haven't been furnished state-of-the-art protection, and some have used hundreds of dollars of their own money to buy their own.**

**How could a government that spends as much on defense as the rest of the world combined fail to allocate enough money for something so basic and critical as this? "I can't answer for the record why we started this war with protective vests that were in short supply," Army Gen. John Abizaid, head of U.S. Central Command, admitted to a congressional committee in September. But he pledged that if the administration got approval of its \$87 billion request for Iraq (as it did), "by November, every soldier that's serving in Iraq will have one."**

**November has gone, but the shortage has not. And still the Pentagon is making lame excuses. "Events since the end of major combat operations in Iraq have differed from our expectations and have combined to cause problems," Army Secretary Les Brownlee said in mid-November. Manufacturers are running flat-out to produce 25,000 vests a month to close the gap. Now, the Army says it will achieve universal coverage by the end of December.**

**That will be cold comfort to anyone killed or wounded for lack of the best protection the military has. And it's unconscionable that the problem was not addressed long before the first troops landed in Iraq. There was plenty of time to get ready for the war, and plenty of money to equip America's fighting forces to keep casualties to a minimum.**

**Americans deserve to know how the lapse occurred, who will be held accountable for exposing our men and women in uniform to needless risk, and what will be done to make sure nothing like it happens again. Congress shouldn't stop pressing until it gets all the answers to a question of life and death.**