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SCHAKOWSKY WARNS AGAINST REPUBLICAN ATTEMPTS TO DISMANTLE THE SUCCESSFUL, TIME TESTED HEAD START PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today said that the so-called School Readiness Act of 2003, H.R. 2210, is an attempt by the Republicans to dismantle the *"successful, time-tested Head Start program."* The House unfortunately passed the Republican measure by a single vote. Below is Schakowsky's statement on H.R. 2210:

Ready or Not

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of Head Start and against H.R. 2210, the so-called School Readiness Act of 2003. The only thing this bill "readies," is the dismantling of the successful, time-tested Head Start program. I am an avid supporter of Head Start and have been since its beginning in 1965 when I taught Head Start classes. The Head Start program was founded on the basic principle that children cannot learn when they are hungry or sick or when their parents are not actively involved in their lives. Currently, this program serves only 60% of eligible pre-schoolers, 3% of eligible infants and toddlers, and 19% of migrant and seasonal farm workers. Congress should be working to strengthen the program and expand the ability of low-income families to access its benefits. Instead, this bill does not even authorize enough funds for the program to cover the cost of inflation.

There is a major difference between what H.R. 2210 claims to do and what it actually does. H.R. 2210 promises quality improvements by increasing teacher credential requirements, but fails to provide any funds to increase teacher salary or assist teachers in obtaining education. Head Start teachers earn half of the average salary for kindergarten teachers-this bill allows only for a modest raise. The bill increases teacher credential requirements-requiring 50% of Head Start teachers to have a B.A. by 2008-while decreasing the amount of funds that are spent on training and technical assistance.

Further placing the future of Head Start at risk, this bill would allow eight states to replace their successful Head Start programs with other unproven pre-school programs. At a time when our states are facing severe budget crises, this bill would turn complete control of the program over to the states. It allows states to set their own quality standards and to determine whether or not they meet those standards. It guts the Head Start program-allowing increases in class size, unproven curricula, and shorter programs that do not provide the crucial nutrition, health, and social services children need to succeed.

More insidious than the full-frontal attack H.R. 2210 wages on Head Start is the attack it

wages on civil rights. H.R. 2210 repeals long-standing civil rights protections to allow faith-based organizations to discriminate on the basis of religion. The bill allows these organizations to use federal dollars to practice discriminatory hiring policies. This is an assault on two of our nation's most fundamental principles: the separation of church and state and equal protection under the law. The federal government should never be in the business of permitting discrimination nor should it break down the historic separation of church and state.

We must stand up for our nations neediest. Head Start provides children in difficult, often impoverished, situations the developmental tools needed to give them a head start in their lives-an equal starting place in life so they can catch up to their more fortunate peers. Children, and their families, cannot afford the loss of any of those services. We must reject H.R. 2210.