JUNE 4, 2003

**{SCHAKOWSKY STATEMENT ON CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT
TO PROHIBIT DESECRATION OF THE FLAG**

WASHINGTON, D.C. --I rise today in opposition to H. J. Res. 4, an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to authorize Congress to prohibit the desecration of the flag. This amendment not only stands in stark contrast to what the flag represents, but this debate today is keeping the House from addressing more urgent matters facing our country.

The flag is a symbol of American greatness. It inspires awe and pride and is the official emblem of our nation. And, above all, it stands for freedom; the freedom we are guaranteed by being lucky enough to live in America. Ironically, this amendment would punish those who exercise that freedom. In our country, dissenting views are allowed and tolerated, even expressions as offensive as flag desecration. To take away this fundamental freedom of expression is to dishonor the flag and the liberty it represents.

Furthermore, this amendment is uncalled for. At this time when there are so many issues that this House should be addressing - when American soldiers continue to die every day in Iraq, when millions of low-income families are being left behind by the Republican Congress and the Bush Administration, when seniors across America can't afford their prescription drugs and millions more lack any health care coverage, and when millions of schoolchildren lack such basic resources as textbooks and safe classrooms - the House is instead debating a bill that is unnecessary, shroud in controversy, vague, and, if passed, would undermine our democracy.

Webster's dictionary defines "desecrate" as "violating the sanctity of" and "treating disrespectfully, irreverently, or outrageously." This bill does not specifically define "desecration." Therefore, if the amendment were to be passed, we would then be forced to discuss whether flag desecration included printing the flag on clothing or dropping small plastic flags on the ground after parades; we would have to discuss if the "protected flags" had size regulations or had to be made of specific material; we would have to decide if flags on personal property were "protected"; and on and on. These debates are unnecessary. Instead of debating what freedoms we should be infringing upon and taking away, this House of Representatives should be doing everything it can to protect people's freedoms, especially our freedom of speech, and be working toward solutions to the problems that plague our constituents every day.