

**MAY 5, 2003**

**SCHAKOWSKY AND ELECTED OFFICIALS MOVE AGAINST THREAT OF WEST NILE VIRUS - HOLD FORUM TO PREPARE AND COORDINATE EFFORTS TO COMBAT VIRUS**

**NORTH SUBURBS HARDEST HIT BY WEST NILE VIRUS LAST YEAR**

**EVANSTON, IL -** Following last year's deadly outbreak of West Nile Virus across the nation and especially in Chicago's Northern Suburbs, U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and local and state elected officials sponsored a forum to confront the challenges posed by the virus to local communities.

Representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Department of Public Health, Cook County Department of Public Health, and North Shore Mosquito Abatement District provided an overview of the virus and planned control efforts for the summer. The officials examined ways to better coordinate region-wide communication and containment approaches, enhance mosquito abatement procedure and strategies, and promote more efficient use of limited local, state, and federal resources.

Last year, Illinois experienced 877 cases of the Virus and 62 fatalities, as well as a noticeable loss of songbirds. Experts believe that West Nile Virus will be even more virulent this year.

Below is Schakowsky's opening statement for the forum:

*Thank you, Mayor Van Dusen for your hospitality and I look forward to working with you and all of our local officials to ensure that our community is prepared this summer against West Nile Virus. I wish to welcome all of our distinguished guests and experts to today's forum and I am anxious to hear their assessment of local, state and federal efforts to combat the virus.*

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*As you are well aware, our community has experienced the deadly affects of this virus, more than any other place in the state of Illinois or the country. Last year, the first full year that the virus was found in Illinois, our state led the nation with 62 deaths and more than 800 cases, most of them right here in the Chicago area. And Illinois had more than 20 percent of the reported cases, 884 out of 4,161.*

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*That is why we must aggressively plan for when the warm weather and mosquito season returns this spring and summer. I know mosquito abatement districts across Illinois are monitoring the mosquito population and are working to identify "hot spots." But districts are not only preparing to respond to West Nile, they are putting in place preventive measure and education campaigns to combat this year's cases.*

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***Training for preventative measures must take place throughout our area. We must educate the public - all public - about this virus. That means more multilingual outreach, outreach to lower wage populations, and an increased effort to reach our senior citizens. We must get the word out. At home, individuals should get rid of standing water on their property and empty water that collects in birdbaths, sand pails, wheelbarrows and garden equipment.***

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***However, this and other efforts cost money, and unfortunately, many Chicago-area mosquito abatement districts are financially strapped because of last summer's efforts to combat the virus. That is why it is critical for the federal government to expand and improve efforts to assist states and localities in battling West Nile Virus.***

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***H.R. 342, the Mosquito Abatement for Safety and Health Act or MASH, was a good step toward meeting that goal. I supported MASH because states like Illinois could receive federal matching grants to assist with programs to prevent and control mosquito-borne diseases. Local governments could use the money to help plan and coordinate mosquito control programs with the states. I am hopeful that the Senate will act this month to pass this very important legislation.***

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***And so far, 10 Illinois County Health Departments have received \$10,000 federal grants to battle West Nile Virus.***

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***But much more must be done. We must work to find ways to increase the federal share to local and state authorities. Illinois had one of the highest rates of West Nile Virus incidence, and I will work to ensure that our state receive adequate federal funding to address this public health matter.***

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***I want to commend all of you once again for coming here today. I believe that we will help combat West Nile through collaborative, community efforts like today's forum. Along with my distinguished colleagues, I stand before you committed to taking on the challenges that this virus presents to our community.***