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SCHAKOWSKY: TRAVEL AND TOURISM CASUALTIES OF BUSH ECONOMY

WASHINGTON, D.C. - During a hearing today to examine the state of the nation's tourism and travel industry, U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) said, "Travel and tourism is just one aspect of the downturned economy. The negative impact the presidential tax policy has had on the economy includes the industry we're focusing on today."

Schakowsky is the ranking Democrat on the Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection. Below is her full statement from the hearing:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your convening this hearing today to examine one aspect of the faltering U.S. economy, the travel and tourism industry. The workers who depend on this industry for their livelihood and the consumers who depend on this industry for their business and personal travel needs justify the serious attention of the Congress to this important issue.

While I am disappointed that we do not have a witness here to specifically address the impact of the current economy on consumers, I am looking forward to hearing from those who are here today.

I believe there are several factors contributing to the decline in business and tourism travel in the United States and the downturn in the U.S. economy in general. Clearly, September 11 had a dramatic impact on the travel industry. The war in Iraq has also had an impact on the flying public. Understandably, many Americans believe that our preemptive military action in Iraq has added to the resolve of those who wish us harm. I have heard from constituents who had the courage to return to the skies after 9/11 but are again fearful because of the potential response to our military action in the Middle East.

Many of us opposed the Administration's war against Iraq because we did not believe that America would necessarily be better off as a result. As the Majority memo indicates, international tourists in the U.S. spend four times the amount domestic travelers spend. Maybe some of our colleagues who antagonized the people and products of other nations before and during the Iraq conflict should undertake efforts to recreate a sense of international good will toward the U.S., like that which existed after 9/11. I have to say it is not entirely surprising to me that residents of some countries are not eager to come to the U.S. today. One, because of our blatant disregard for world opinion and two, because of the assault on civil liberties and immigrants that has been initiated by this Administration. One of the casualties of the Iraq war and other Bush Administration policies certainly appears to be the travel and tourism industry.

While 9/11 and the war in Iraq have hurt the U.S. economy, the one single factor that has led to the economic decline in my view is the President's tax cut. I realize that tax cut is not the subject of today's hearing. However, I think any complete discussion of factors contributing to our current economic conditions should include a discussion of the negative impact the President's tax policy has had on our economy and outlook for a strong recovery.

I appreciate the opportunity to hear from our witnesses today, and I am eager to discuss ways we can help the workers and consumers who rely on the travel and tourism industry for their livelihood and other important needs.