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CONGRESS APPROVES SCHAKOWSKY MEASURE TO INCREASE PROTECTIONS FOR TAXPAYERS AGAINST WASTE, FRAUD AND ABUSE AT ENERGY DEPARTMENT

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congress approved a measure by U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) to strengthen *"protections against waste, fraud and abuse of taxpayer funds at the Department of Energy."*

Schakowsky's amendment was included in H.R. 6, the Energy Policy Act of 2003.

H.R. 6 was passed by the House, however, Schakowsky did not vote for the bill because it *"did not do enough to guard our environment from corporate polluters, promote renewable fuels and efficiency, or protect consumers from high prices caused by market manipulation."* In addition, the bill opens precious public lands, the National Arctic Wildlife Refuge, to oil drilling and energy development.

Schakowsky, a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, spoke on the House floor in support of her amendment. Below is her statement:

"The amendment I am offering today addresses a serious problem that exists at several U.S. Government agencies, including the Department of Energy. It seeks to put Congress on record in support of strengthened protections against waste, fraud and abuse of taxpayer funds at the Department of Energy."

"The amendment expresses the sense of Congress that:

"(1) the Secretary of Energy should develop and implement more stringent procurement and inventory controls, including controls on the purchase card program, to prevent waste, fraud and abuse of taxpayer funds by employees and contractors of the Department of Energy ; and

"(2) the Department's Inspector General should continue to closely review purchase card purchases and other procurement and inventory practices at the Department."

"Since 1998, the Inspector General at the Department of Energy has conducted 20 reviews at 11 different sites. As a result of the reviews, it was found that the Department of Energy employees illegally misused government purchase cards to acquire such unofficial items as home improvement products, hunting equipment, electronics, lawn equipment, and power tools, all for personal, not official, use."

"The DOE Inspector General has also reported that Department of Energy employees have undertaken other complex and illegal schemes to acquire items for personal use, such as generating fraudulent invoices to mask making those purchases, providing

kickbacks to suppliers who agreed to participate in quid pro quo schemes, circumventing Department policies and procedures by allowing employees to approve their own purchase card transactions, and acquiring goods for personal use that were delivered to non-department locations.[] []

"Such problems have led the General Accounting Office "to designate DOE contract management, defined broadly to include both contract administration and management of the projects, as a high-risk area for fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement."[] []

"The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on Energy and Commerce held two hearings this year to review illegal procurement practices at the Los Alamos National Laboratories. Thanks to brave whistleblowers and the Inspector General, Los Alamos personnel were caught using thousands of taxpayer dollars to buy items like sunglasses, hunting knives and, get this, lock-picking sets, golf equipment, sleeping bags, and more. One employee even attempted to purchase a Ford Mustang using her Federal Government purchase card. Another employee used her government purchase card at local casinos.[]

"While some of the more newsworthy examples are about the purchase card program, other problems exist with inventory and procurement control in general. The IG has also reported hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of "unlocated, lost, or stolen" items, including desktop computers, laptop computers, cameras, computer printers, radio transceivers, video recorders, and telephones.[]

"These examples are just the tip of the iceberg. Passage of this non-controversial amendment will put us all on record in support of additional efforts to root out this kind of shameful abuse of taxpayer funds."