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SCHAKOWSKY CHALLENGES BUSH ADMINISTRATION TO REVERSE FAILED AND DANGEROUS DRUG INTERDICTION POLICY EFFORT IN COLOMBIA AND TO UPHOLD US LAW

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today challenged the Bush Administration to alter its flawed drug interdiction policy in Colombia and to uphold U.S. law. The current policy is drawing the United States deeper into Colombia's civil war, rewarding human right abuses by the Colombian military, and is weighted heavily toward a supply-side reduction, a strategy that has not decreased substance abuse in the United States.

During today's hearing in the Government Reform Committee, Schakowsky also underscored the failure of U.S. officials posted in Colombia in dealing with the growing human rights crisis in that country. Below is Schakowsky's full statement from today's hearing:

**Statement of the Honorable Jan Schakowsky
Government Reform Hearing on
"America's Heroin Crisis, Colombian Heroin, and How We Can Improve Plan Colombia"
December 12, 2002**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your making time in the last month of your tenure as head of this Committee to focus attention on the growing Heroin crisis in America, as well as our country's severely flawed policy in Colombia. The Heroin crisis in America does need urgent attention. This problem is unlike other substance abuse cases. Heroin is more addictive, more lethal in small doses, and at times easier to obtain by teenagers than any other form of intoxicant. I welcome our law enforcement witnesses and look forward to hearing their views on how we can best address this subject.

However, as will be clearly evident during today's hearing, there is not agreement among members on how the Heroin problem in America can be best addressed. I strongly oppose much of the policies put into place by Plan Colombia and the Andean Region Initiative because they have been too heavily weighted toward a supply-side reduction, a strategy that has not decreased substance abuse in the United States. The policy so far has largely disregarded concerns about several important issues including: human rights abuses committed by corrupt forces within the Colombian military; the plight of Colombia's internally displaced population; alternative development; human and environmental health concerns related to the campaign of aerial fumigation of coca-a

campaign that has failed to achieve its goals; corruption within Colombia; mismanagement of U.S. taxpayer dollars; and failure by our embassy and State Department officials to enforce U.S. law, and a failure of the Colombian Government-its Attorney General in particular-to pursue cases against known human rights offenders.[] []

New concerns have been raised by many human rights advocates and members of Congress about the changing nature of our mission in Colombia.[] Congress this year authorized funds previously appropriated for counter-narcotics operations in Colombia to be used for counter-insurgency.[] The Administration has a plan to provide to Colombia and to Occidental petroleum, for starters, over \$100 million from U.S. taxpayers to protect a portion of the Cano-Limon oil pipeline.[] I oppose our mission shift in Colombia and I oppose the Administration's pipeline protection program.[] This mission shift will put U.S. personnel directly into Colombia's decades-old civil war.[] The pipeline program is a giveaway from the U.S. government to an incredibly wealthy corporation and we have no guarantee of a return on our investment, not even a deal for a discount on Occidental oil.[] []

I want to move on and discuss what I believe to be the best way we can improve our Colombia policy, and that is to uphold U.S. principles and laws.[] And I want to use an example to underscore the failure of our officials posted in Colombia to demonstrate leadership on this subject.[] []

On December 13, 1998, in the Colombian village called Santo Domingo seventeen civilians, including six children, were killed when Colombian military helicopters, provided to Colombia by the U.S., dropped, what the FBI later certified was U.S.-made bombs on the community.[] This appeared to many of us, including Senator Leahy, to be a clear violation of the Leahy law, which requires that U.S. aid be cut off to Colombian military units "credibly alleged to have committed gross violations of human rights," until perpetrators are brought to justice.[] []

While some actions were taken, investigations were opened and closed and reopened, the United States failed to show a commitment to the law over the course of this case.[] Meanwhile, troubling information came out in the testimony of witnesses and in the press. Colombian personnel directly involved in the operation over Santo Domingo have testified that they were given the coordinates to drop the bombs on Santo Domingo by a U.S. contractor called Air Scan.[] Air Scan was under contract to provide security to Occidental oil.[] []

Over two years after the bombing and almost two years ago, I met with U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Anne Patterson.[] I raised the case of Santo Domingo. Ambassador Patterson urged me to be patient.[] She acknowledged that she was on "thin ice on this one" and that very soon she hoped there would be major progress on the case.[] That was in February of 2001.[] Ambassador Patterson waited 1 year and 9 months from then and almost four years from the time of the attack on Santo Domingo to recommend to the State Department that the Leahy law be invoked and aid to the Colombian Air Force

unit implicated in the case be suspended. We still do not know the response of the recommendation. Granted, even if she wanted to do so sooner, she may have been prevented from taking action because of the Bush Administration's disinterest in this case.

I challenge any member and any representative of the State Department to say that this is an example of leadership and a commitment to human rights and upholding U.S. laws. We are rewarding an oil company that hired a contractor to work with a corrupt military by providing that same company with over \$100 million in security aid. And, according to the Secretary of State, we are rewarding the military involved in this case, and countless other massacres of innocent civilians, with additional U.S. aid.

This case is an embarrassing and shameful blemish on the United States. To me it symbolizes all that is wrong with our policy and our priorities in Colombia. It is too bad that Ambassador Patterson, for whom I have a great deal of respect, is not here to answer questions on this important case.

Mr. Chairman, these are just some of the important issues today's hearing should be considering. I intend to use my time for questions on these issues. I welcome our witnesses and I look forward to their testimony.