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**SCHAKOWSKY ADDRESSES AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT
EMPLOYEES CONVENTION IN CHICAGO**

CHICAGO, IL - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today addressed the American Federation of Government Employees Convention in Chicago. Schakowsky is a dues-paying member of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE!). Below is Schakowsky's statement.

Over the past 2 years, we have seen a coordinated and concerted effort by Republicans to attack public employees through (1) budget cuts, (2) privatization and deregulation and (3) anti-union activities.

The Bush budget proposes cuts in everything from job training (down \$686 million) to environment (down \$461 million) to elementary and secondary education initiatives (down \$90 million). The proposed budget doesn't provide pay parity in agencies like the SEC and cuts administrative resources for Medicare. Non-homeland security domestic programs are cut 4.7% below the level just to maintain purchasing power at the 2002 level.

These cuts are not necessary. Last summer, we had a \$5.6 trillion surplus - a surplus that has disappeared not because of spending on homeland security (which accounts for 12% of the disappearing surplus) but because of tax cuts for millionaires. According to the Congressional Budget Office, those tax cuts are the single biggest reason why we now have a deficit instead of a surplus -- (39% of the disappeared surplus).

Those tax cuts serve two purposes - they reward rich Republican contributors and they shrink government by eliminating the revenues needed to fund education, the environment, health care, food and water safety, and other vital initiatives.

In addition to cutting funding, the Republican leadership and White House are pushing privatization/deregulation. They insist that government functions be contracted out and demand that every agency come up with a list of everything that can be privatized. They brought in Tom White from Enron to be Secretary of the Army and bring energy deregulation to the military. They want to turn Medicare over to HMOs and Social Security over to Wall Street.

Deregulation hasn't been a success for airline passengers, telephone or cable users or energy consumers - but it hasn't stopped them. If it makes profit for their friends, it doesn't matter.

The third leg of this attack is to go after unions - everything from denying whistleblower protections to employees or threatening paycheck deception or taking away the rights to

join a union at all. This is the same administration that acted early on to reverse the Clinton executive order banning companies that violate labor laws from receiving government contracts. The Bush message: violators have nothing to fear - go after your workers and you can still get a lucrative government contract.

The latest evidence of this anti-union attack is the Department of Homeland Security bill. Over 177,000 employees would be transferred to the new department, many of them are now union members. The bill gives the President and the new Secretary the right to take away Department employees' rights to form unions and bargain collectively if they determine their work directly affects national security. But it also gives them the ability to erode the power of unions where they do exist.

Here is the description of this provision from the factsheet on the bill:

Any new system must generally allow employees to form unions and bargain collectively, although under the bill either the president or DHS secretary could exempt employees engaged in intelligence or other work that directly affects national security. (Currently, only the president is authorized to exempt groups of employees from union representation based on national security grounds.) Moreover, unlike current law, employee collective bargaining rights in any new system would not necessarily include any of the following features - the requirement that agencies recognize elected unions as the exclusive representative of employees; a right to have union representatives present at grievances; the requirement to mediate disputes with unions in the case of an impasse; or a prohibition on an agency from discouraging union membership.

This is an outrageous provision - if you have a union it may have no right to protect your interests - added by the Republican leadership before the bill went to the House floor. No Democratic leadership would have done so.

Many issues over the past few years have been decided by a handful of votes, virtually by party line. A switch of one vote would have defeated fast track in 2001; a switch of two votes would have stopped the trade bill this June. A switch of two votes would have stopped fast track. A switch of two votes would have defeated the economic stimulus bill in the House that gave Enron \$254 million in retroactive alternative minimum tax payments but provided no assistance for laid-off workers. A switch of three votes would have made HMOs fully liable for decisions that injure or kill patients. A switch of five votes would have stopped corporate pension loopholes that allow executives to profit while employees lose savings. A switch of six votes would have gotten real unemployment and health assistance to laid off airline workers last November. A switch of six votes would have defeated the Republican bill that turned Medicare prescription drug coverage over to private insurers. And a switch of eight votes would have eliminated that anti-union provisions in the Department of Homeland Security bill.

Taking back the House in November means that we will have a pro-union leadership in charge - Dick Gephardt and Nancy Pelosi instead of Dennis Hastert and Tom DeLay. It means that Henry Waxman will be running the Government Reform Committee and

overseeing civil service laws - not Dan Burton. It means that George Miller will be the chair of the Education and Labor Committee. It means we will be able to fight offensive battles according to our schedule, instead of playing defense in a game where the other side sets all the rules.

Taking back the House, keeping the Senate, winning statehouse and gubernatorial elections here in Illinois and elsewhere - that is what will make the difference for federal employees, public employees and all working families.

And it will help set the stage for putting a pro-union Democrat in the White House in 2004. The stakes are too high for anyone to sit it out between now and November. We need a focused campaign plan to educate union members, get those members to educate their friends and family and co-workers, mobilize voters and get each voter to the polls on November 5.