JULY 24, 2002

SCHAKOWSKY DEFENDS A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE AGAINST LATEST REPUBLICAN ATTACK (H.R. 4965)

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- This bill is an affront to all women; it is an insult to the medical profession; and it violates the Constitution!

Abortion is a Constitutionally protected medical procedure in this country and this bill flatly aims to take away that right. It does NOT aim to ban a single procedure that proponents of this bill like to call "partial birth abortion." If it did, the sponsors of this bill would have accepted medical language that actually describes a medical procedure. But they rejected this language. Instead, the proponents chose to play doctor and describe a so-called medical procedure in their own words.

This bill doesn't even ban what some may call late-term abortion because it never specifies a point in the pregnancy after which an abortion is banned. What this bill really does is chip away at Roe v. Wade.

The proponents of this bill don't trust women to make their own decisions about their reproductive health. They don't trust women to talk to their doctors about their health, about their choices, and then make their own, informed decisions. They don't want to give women the power and freedom to make their own decisions about their reproductive lives, despite the fact that the Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld this right in the face of countless challenges.

The recent challenge in Stenburg v. Carhart yielded a decision where the Supreme Court found Nebraska's ban on so-called partial birth abortion unconstitutional, in part because it does not make an exception for the health of a woman! And the bill before us contains this same flaw. That alone should be reason enough for any member of this House to vote NO on this bill.

Proponents of this bill should be ashamed to go home to their wives, daughters, nieces, sisters, and women constituents and explain to them why they voted for a bill that not only blatantly disregards their health, but tries to claim that it is not an issue; explain to them why they voted for a bill that would criminalize the behavior of their doctors who acted in their best interest because a law said that their health did not matter; explain to them why they refused to let anyone else in this House offer an amendment that simply would have taken a woman's health into consideration.

The Stenberg decision also declared the Nebraska law unconstitutional because it burdened a woman's right to choose by banning safe abortion procedures. Let's forget the rhetoric we've been hearing this afternoon from the proponents of this bill and talk about the truth. For us to be true to our Constitution, to be true to the sentiments of

equality and freedom, women must have control over their own bodies. The Constitution recognizes this, yet the proponents of this legislation could care less. They are determined to do whatever they can to take away a woman's right to choose, and therefore her freedom and equality.

This assault must stop and I urge my colleagues to vote no on HR 4965.