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**HOMELAND SECURITY DIRECTOR RIDGE AGREES WITH SCHAKOWSKY - POTASSIUM IODIDE PILLS PROVIDE "SOME PROTECTION TO CITIZENS"**

**ILLINOIS REFUSES FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OFFER OF FREE PILLS THAT COULD SAVE LIVES IN CASE OF ACCIDENT OR ATTACK ON NUCLEAR FACILITIES**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In response to a question from U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge said, "*making this potassium iodide available, it is a good way to begin partnering with the state and local governments to give a little more assurance and provide some protection to citizens.*"

Schakowsky, who is leading efforts to convince the state of Illinois to accept the free offer from the federal government to stockpile potassium iodide pills, questioned Ridge during a Government Reform Hearing on the President's proposal to create a Homeland Security Department. Potassium iodide pills help insulate the thyroid gland from absorbing dangerous radioactive substances, such as Iodine 131, that may cause cancer.

"Governor Ridge agrees with most experts and ordinary people that it makes sense to distribute potassium iodide pills. It makes even more sense to distribute them in Illinois, the most nuclear state in the country," said Schakowsky.

More than a dozen states, including New York, Florida, and California have accepted the free offer of potassium iodide pills from the federal government to distribute to residents within 10 miles of a nuclear power plant. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has stated that the pills are "*a reasonable, prudent and inexpensive supplement to evacuation and sheltering in the event of a severe nuclear power plant accident.*"

And, according to the Food and Drug Administration, the pills are safe.

Earlier, Schakowsky had said, "I don't understand why the offer of free pills, which are approved by the FDA, should not be taken. To me this just seems like foot dragging."