

APRIL 8, 2002

SCHAKOWSKY KEYNOTES THE WOMEN'S EQUALITY SUMMIT CONGRESSIONAL ACTION DAY

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- It is such a thrill to be here today - to look out and to see so many fabulous women who are here to fight for equality. I particularly want to thank Dr. Martha Burk, the chair of the National Council of Women's Organizations. Your passion and commitment and drive for economic and social justice inspires us all.

There are so many wonderful women here today. And I can tell you that we desperately need each and every one of you. Every day, we hear the same drumbeat: privatize Social Security, turn Medicare over to the HMOs, cut domestic spending and make way for more tax cuts for the wealthy.

We need you to speak as loudly as you can and as often as you can so that we can drown out that drumbeat. I know that we are going to do that tomorrow when you visit the Hill and that you are committed to continuing to fight for equality when you return home.

Lately, I've been giving a speech that I call "Why I admire the Republicans." That's right. I'll explain.

Recently, there was a graph in the Chicago Tribune and it showed that for most of the last 21 years there has been a deficit in the Federal budget. It got huge in the 80's began a steady climb all the way to record surpluses in the 90's and then, in one short year, the line plummets downward, and we are back into deficit spending. Now this graph only showed years, not Presidents. But it doesn't take a genius to see that Republican Presidents Reagan and Bush 1 had us seriously in debt, Clinton, Democrat, no thanks to the Republicans in Congress, more than eliminated the entire deficit, and I might add, presided over the most robust period of economic growth in history. And then, in one year, Republican son, George W squandered the surplus and recreated deficits. That's just a fact, and not why I admire them.

The reason I admire them, is that despite these irrefutable numbers they still insist that they wear the jacket of fiscal responsibility, and they still pin the label of "tax and spend" liberal on us, and because they are so relentless in repeating this message, many Americans, believe them and they get away with it. Remarkable!!!

I admire the Republicans because they shamelessly defend their constituents - though some may call them investors or even stockholders. They have one answer for every situation and that answer is: tax cuts for the rich. Here's how it works. You can help me out. The question is, What is the best way to address a budget surplus? Tax cuts for the rich. What do you do when there is a downturn in the economy? A terrorist

attack? A recession? The need to stimulate the economy? It makes life simple and it comforts the people, the very few people, that they really care about. It's been called Enron Economics - Give to the rich. Take from the rest.

And look at what Enron Economics means for Social Security. The Trustees just reported that the Social Security Trust Fund is in better shape now that it has been in decades - able to pay 100 percent of benefits through 2041 and, even then, able to deliver 72% of benefits. Enron employees who were counting on their 401(k)s, on the other hand, are left with nothing. Does that give the Bush Administration even a moment's pause? It doesn't matter to them that Social Security provides the only guaranteed retirement income for women (and men), survivors benefits and disability protection. If privatization helps Wall Street, that's what counts.

Unfortunately, they are not always open and forthright about their plans for Social Security (or anything else for that matter). They will say, for example, that they want to protect Social Security, even as they make plans to privatize it. To prove how much they love Social Security, they want to send out certificates, suitable, I suppose for framing, to all Social Security beneficiaries, guaranteeing them that their benefits will not be cut - certificates that we estimate will cost over \$40 million to mail and won't be worth the paper they are printed on - certificates that aren't legal documents, that are good only as long as the law doesn't change, that say nothing about tomorrow's retirees. Some of you may remember the image on TV in 1989 of Congressman Dan Rostenkowski, Chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee being chased down the street by senior citizens in Chicago. I was Exec. Dir. Of the organization that chased him, though I did not orchestrate that spontaneous event. I predict that if the Republicans dare to send out those certificates, they better also buy some running shoes.

You also have to hand it to President Bush - who has not let anything divert him from his attacks on a woman's right to choose. Remember back to his very first working day in office. What did he do? What was his first priority? He declared war on women's reproductive rights by reinstating the global "gag" rule on family planning. Remember that he attacked the health and lives of the most vulnerable women on our planet whenever you hear the Administration touting its concern for international women's rights.

Although we've been told that everything that we care about has to take a backseat to the war on terrorism, somehow HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson found the time to propose a policy to define a fetus as a person when it comes to the children's health insurance program. Most people would expand access to prenatal care by covering pregnant women but, of course, that wouldn't aid the Administration's efforts to erode Roe v. Wade.

We just won a fantastic victory in the fight to preserve Roe v. Wade. Through your efforts, the Senate Judiciary Committee rejected the nomination of Judge Pickering - a man who has spent a good part of his life working to take reproductive and other rights

away from women. That vote sent the Bush Administration a loud, clear message: we will not sit idly by and let you appoint judges who oppose the right to choose, women's rights, equal rights and civil rights.

We know, though, that there are many more Pickerings waiting in the wings. We have to organize, recruit, educate, and mobilize to prevent any of those Pickerings from being appointed. We have to be even more shameless in fighting for women than they are in fighting for the rich and special corporate interests.

We have to fight for those who will otherwise be ignored and left behind.

In the United States, one out of every 6 women and girls will be beaten or sexually assaulted in her lifetime. Every 90 seconds, a woman is raped. Across the world, 1 in 3 women will be the victim of assault or sexual abuse in her lifetime. We must be shameless in calling for an end to violence against women. We cannot let this Administration tell us that the war on terrorism doesn't include fighting terrorism against women. The budget resolution we just passed in the House last month would actually cut the Violence Against Women Act grants. We cannot and will not wait for funding for prevention, for shelters, for assistance. The brutalization of women must stop now.

We must be shameless in demanding affordable childcare, prescription drug coverage, health care for our children. We must demand that the reauthorization of TANF focus on lifting women and families out of poverty - not throwing them off of assistance. We must reduce poverty, not just caseloads. We cannot let this Administration and the Republican leadership tell us there is no money to meet those needs while they find trillions of dollars to cut taxes for the wealthy.

We must be shameless in demanding real rights for women around the world, not rhetoric that is backed up only by hot air. I will soon introduce legislation to expand the definition of international workers rights to include non-discrimination on the basis of gender. I believe that we should not give preferential trade status to countries and companies that discriminate against women. I hope that you will join me in that effort. We also must act now to help women in Afghanistan - not just in words but in deeds. Last year, we passed legislation to help Afghan women but there was no actual funding provided to do so. We have to demand that they show us the money if they want to claim credit for addressing the problem.

I am so pleased that you are going to the Hill tomorrow to make your voices heard and that you will join Rosa DeLauro and others in a rally to Protect Social Security. We cannot let anyone Enronize Social Security - we must keep the promise. Come tomorrow at 1:00 to the House Triangle and make a lot of noise so that we can keep the guarantee.

We must never be apologetic about standing up for women and our values and our priorities. We must not be afraid to stand up to a President because of his standing in the polls. We cannot agree to let them send battered women or older women without

prescription drugs or homeless women or working women without access to affordable child care to the back of the line while the rich move to the front. We cannot let them fool us with phony certificates while they develop their strategies to privatize Social Security.

We must all deliver our message loudly and clearly tomorrow, in the days ahead, and in the ballot booth in November.

I am proud to be with you today and every day in sending that message.