

January 24, 2002

**SCHAKOWSKY SEEKS ANSWERS
TO GULF WAR SYNDROME**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today said, "It is our responsibility to do whatever we must to determine the causes of symptoms and illnesses related to the Gulf war, immediately." Schakowsky spoke during a hearing of the National Security, Veterans Affairs, and International Relations Subcommittee on gulf war veterans' illnesses. Below is Schakowsky's opening statement.

In late 1991, almost immediately after the Gulf War, the first reports of symptoms and illnesses flooded doctors offices and VA facilities across the country. Veterans, who, before the war, were in perfect physical health, were suffering from debilitating symptoms. In the years following the war, the media highlighted stories of symptoms ranging from chronic fatigue, headaches, and muscle pains, coupled with reports of the diagnosis of Gulf War veterans with cancer, heart and lung problems and Lou Gehrig's Disease. This committee alone has held four hearings on the issue. I am glad that we have a chance to discuss the GAO's findings. Their hard work provides further evidence of a link between Gulf War service and illness. As studies continue and revelations are made, we should give these soldiers the benefit of the doubt and provide treatment for those suffering. Individuals exposed to illness cannot afford to wait until we establish links beyond a reasonable doubt. Lives are at stake now.

Just over a month ago, the VA and DoD released a study that found preliminary evidence that veterans who served in Desert Shield-Desert Storm are nearly twice as likely as non-deployed service personnel to develop Lou Gehrig's Disease. Secretary Anthony J. Principi said that the VA would immediately begin providing additional benefits and compensation to veterans who were deployed in the Gulf and developed the disease. This startling confirmation of a ten-year suspicion is evidence, not only for the need to continue and intensify research on this issue, but the need to emphasize finding answers and solutions. I am pleased to see that health care provided to those suffering from diseases-I believe its necessary and fair. In fact, we should do more. It is our responsibility to do whatever we must to determine the causes of symptoms and illnesses related to the Gulf war, immediately.

Last week Assistant Secretary of Defense Dr. William Winkenwerder, who is with us today, sent a memo to top officials of the US Army, Navy and Air Force, requesting that the armed forces strengthen the vaccine ban for pregnant servicewomen. Dr. Winkenwerder's concerns were spurred by preliminary data released from a Naval Health Research Center study. This study, which examined women who received the anthrax vaccine, identified a possible link between the vaccine and birth defects. Though this study is in its preliminary stages, this information could be vital in protecting future mothers and their children. I requested a GAO study on this subject in 1999 and am

concerned over these findings. We must protect our service personnel from service related illness in whatever form it takes.

America is at war. Our troops are deployed as we speak fighting to rid the world of the threat of terrorism. When our troops return, they should not have to wait ten years to find that they were becoming ill because we didn't protect them. Our troops returning from war abroad should not have to fight for their lives at home. I hope we are all committed to providing answers for our veterans through this time of uncertainty.