

DECEMBER 20, 2001

SCHAKOWSKY PARTICIPATES IN CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING ON BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today participated in a Congressional briefing on recent actions by the Bush Administration regarding the Biological Weapons Convention. The briefing was organized by U.S. Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA), ranking member on the Government Reform Committee, and sponsored by the Federation of American Scientists, 20/20 Vision, and the Council for a Livable World.

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Below is Schakowsky's statement:

"Biological weapons exist, and various nations have had and continue to have biological weapons programs. The threat of biological terror has now become a reality for those of us on Capitol Hill and elsewhere.□□□"

"Under the control of the Bush Administration, the United States has, unfortunately, gone in the wrong direction on the Biological Weapons Convention. Given the current situation, this Administration should redouble its efforts to safeguard Americans from potential biological weapons attacks. The international coalition that the Administration has assembled in the war on terrorism presented the Administration with a golden opportunity to make some real progress on this subject and I am disappointed that it has not taken that opportunity."

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"We cannot afford to abandon our efforts because of pharmaceutical industry concerns or difficulty in enforcing international principles on non-proliferation of biological weapons."

"I am extremely disappointed at the actions last week in Geneva by the U.S. delegation to the international conference negotiating inspections under the Biological Weapons Convention. These actions have insulted our allies and have put this nation at greater risk."

"Even before September 11, the Bush Administration made clear its unwillingness to seriously engage with the international community on this issue. Except to make clear its opposition to measures originally put forth by the Clinton Administration that would have strengthened the Biological Weapons Convention and protected this country. Instead, the Bush Administration put the interests of their friends in the pharmaceutical industry first."

"I want to share with all of you an exert from a review of the negotiations in Geneva. It was written by Professor Barry Kellman the Director of Depaul University's International

Weapons Control Center:

The Biological Weapons Convention Review Conference ended abruptly on December 7, 2001, when the United States delegation submitted a last-minute poison pill

Clearly, Americans are vulnerable to international bio-terrorism. The expertise and capabilities to turn pathogens into weapons is widespread. It is not beyond reason to expect that forces hostile to the United States, yet not deterrable, will produce biological weapons somewhere and transport them without detection. Once here, the level of potential devastation is staggering. Only the myopic would deny the need for international cooperation to combat this threat. Developing strategies is a complicated task, all the more so in connection with multilateral diplomacy, but these difficulties must not be an excuse for abandoning the effort.

The BWC RevCon was the first and only international discussion of how to control weapons of mass destruction since September 11th. Amidst the President's calls for a new global coalition to root out terrorists wherever they may, diplomats arrived in Geneva with a heightened appreciation for the consequences of inaction as well as for the unique role of American leadership in this campaign. Despite sincere disagreements over the ability to verify compliance, every national delegation expressed willingness to consider new ideas, and all of the ideas in the U.S. Concept Paper were received with interest. The three weeks of negotiations raised many points of controversy, but a consensus was, by the end, emerging.

Now, those opportunities have been dashed. In short, as one delegate put it when leaving the hall the last evening: 'Saddam Hussein must be very pleased.'

"I am sure most of you saw the article in today's New York Times on this subject. The article quotes a recent Iraqi defector with close ties to Saddam Hussein's regime as saying that he personally worked on renovations of secret facilities to further Iraq's biological, chemical and nuclear weapons programs."

"Saddam Hussein must be very happy indeed."

"And with that, I want to again thank all of our participants and Mr. Waxman. I look forward to this important discussion."