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OP-ED BY U.S. REPRESENTATIVE JAN SCHAKOWSKY IN *FORWARD* ON TAX CUT FOR THE WEALTHY

*There's Still Time To Stop the Tax Cut*  
By JAN SCHAKOWSKY

As Jews, our mission is tikkun olam - repairing the world. This mandate informs my decisions as a lawmaker and helps me set my priorities. It makes it easy for me to decide whether it is more important to give a tax break to those who have the most, or provide affordable housing to those who have the least.

Every day, we in the United States House of Representatives make critical choices that affect the lives of millions of Americans. One decision in particular, to grant a \$2 trillion tax cut, has shaped all the other decisions that we make in regard to the allocation of precious resources. The minute the tax cut was signed into law, it became impossible to fund many vital programs and services and jeopardized others that our community has fought to protect over many decades.

The biggest chunk of the tax cut, 43%, goes to the richest Americans. Some individuals will benefit to the tune of millions of dollars. To name two examples, Vice President Dick Cheney and Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill will see income tax savings of \$1.7 million and \$3.5 million, respectively. As a matter of fact, under this tax cut the top Bush administration officials, including the president, will see more than \$88 million in tax saving. All the while, 21% of Americans will receive no tax savings whatsoever.

There is not a penny in President Bush's budget for a prescription drug benefit under Medicare that would allow our elders to afford their medication. Two billion dollars are actually cut from affordable housing programs despite the fact that 5.4 million Americans face what the experts call "worst-case housing needs." Winter cold and summer heat cause misery for those who can't pay their energy bills, but there is not enough money to respond to their cries. Proposals to cut Social Security benefits and to raise the age at which individuals may draw benefits are being seriously considered. On top of the tax cut to the rich, the House just passed an energy bill with \$33 billion in subsidies and tax giveaways to Big Oil and Big Gas. In fact, in order to pay for the tax breaks it appears that it may be necessary to raid the Medicare trust fund.

The rationale for the huge tax cut is that we have a huge "surplus" in the federal budget. That's an odd way of thinking. Would any American family say that they had a surplus in their household budget if they had no health insurance or a decent roof over their head, or couldn't afford to send their child to college? Of course they wouldn't. But as an American family, that is exactly what we did when the Congress passed the president's massive tax cut.

**It is not too late to put family needs first. The Bush tax cut is a gradual plan that is to be phased in over a decade. According to an analysis by the liberal lobbying group Citizens for Tax Justice, four out of five taxpayers will receive most of their tax breaks from changes that occur this year. After 2001, more than half of the remaining tax cuts would benefit the wealthiest 1% of the population. We should put the brakes on. There's no need to allow those tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthy to take effect until we've first met the needs of the majority of Americans.**

**That is why I will be introducing legislation that will delay any additional cuts in the top marginal income tax rates and modify the estate tax repeal until we:**

- 1. Can assure the American public that doing so will not jeopardize the Social Security or Medicare Trust Funds or force cuts in benefits.**
- 2. Add a comprehensive prescription drug benefit to Medicare.**
- 3. Provide full funding to modernize schools and add 100,000 teachers.**
- 4. Significantly reduce the number of Americans with "worst-case" housing needs.**

**As Jews, we are raised to believe that we have a responsibility to care for one another and for our communities. We are taught a tradition of justice and an ethic that urges us to respond not just to our neighbors but to the stranger who needs our help. At this time when so much is at stake, it is imperative that we act in keeping with those traditions.**