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**SCHAKOWSKY, OTHERS DEFEAT BACKDOOR ATTEMPT FOR U.S.  
TO FUND UNLIMITED NUMBERS OF PRIVATE MILITARY CONTRACTORS IN COLOMBIA**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today declared victory after defeating a backdoor attempt to give the President the authority to unilaterally increase the number of U.S. funded private soldiers in Colombia to any level without informing Congress. The House unanimously approved an amendment by Schakowsky and U.S. Representatives John Conyers (D-MI) and Pete Hoekstra (R-MI) to the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill that eliminated that provision, which was hidden in the massive funding bill.**

**Under current law, a total of 500 U.S. personnel and 300 Private Military Contractors (PMCs) are allowed to operate in Colombia. The amendment states that the aggregate number of PMCs and U.S. Military personnel operating in Colombia can not exceed 800, with no more than 500 U.S. military personnel operating in that country. In addition, the amendment would ensure that in order for the President to hire more than 300 civilian contract personnel to carry out U.S. policy in Colombia, he must first report to the Congress.**

**"I believe that the use of taxpayer-funded private armies in Colombia and the Andean Region is a misguided policy and is a disaster in the making. With the blessing of our State Department and other agencies, private military contractors operate with little or no transparency or accountability to the American people," Schakowsky said.**

**"Until we end the use of private soldiers in the Andean Region, there is no good reason why Congress should surrender its oversight duties and give the President the authority to unilaterally increase the number of private military contractors operating in Colombia. We must not let President Bush and his State Department escalate our involvement in Colombia and waste hundreds of millions of dollars on private military contractors, who continually operate under the radar," Schakowsky said.**

**Schakowsky concluded that she will continue to seek support for her legislation, the Andean Region Contractor Accountability Act, H.R. 1591, to prohibit the federal government from funding private armies in the Andean region. The bill specifically states that the U.S. government cannot enter into a contract with private organizations or individuals "to carry out military, law enforcement, armed rescue, or other related operations in the countries of the Andean region, including any operations relating to narcotics control efforts." This bill would not hinder humanitarian activities or aid. Currently, private companies are being paid by the federal government to pilot drug-crop fumigation aircraft, fly helicopters transporting Colombian army battalions, gather aerial intelligence and perform armed search and rescue missions.**