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SCHAKOWSKY WARNS ABOUT UNACCEPTABLE LEVELS OF ARSENIC IN ILLINOIS DRINKING AND GROUND WATER

BUSH BOWED TO SPECIAL INTERESTS AND MADE U.S. WATER STANDARD SAME AS DEVELOPING NATIONS

CHICAGO, IL - On Earth Day 2001, U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) warned that the health of thousands of Illinois residents is at risk since their drinking water contains unacceptable levels of arsenic. Schakowsky held a news conference at Foster Beach on Lake Michigan with environmentalists, concerned residents, and local elected officials.

Schakowsky released a report showing that as many as 134,000 people in Illinois in almost 60 communities are drinking water that contains arsenic levels above the standard of 10 parts per billion (ppb). The 10ppb standard was recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in January 2001. Unfortunately, the Bush Administration revoked the 10ppb rule in March 2001 and returned to the old standard of 50ppb. The Bush Administration claims that it needs additional time to gather scientific evidence and will announce a new standard early next year.

The EPA made the recommendation after years of scientific research and expert analysis concluded that the old standard developed in 1942 of 50ppb increases health risks. A National Academy of Sciences study also found that 1 in 100 people exposed to arsenic in drinking water at 50 ppb can suffer from lung, bladder, and skin cancer and a host of other ailments. According to EPA, at 10ppb, the cancer risk would decrease to an estimated 1 in 2500. Nationwide, more than 12 million people are exposed to drinking water with more than 10ppb.

"Science has proven that Arsenic is a carcinogen and it is deadly - it causes cancer, birth defects, and cardiovascular disease. What more evidence does President Bush needs to get it out of our water? I've been a consumer rights advocates for a long time and in public office for ten years, and until now, I've never met a leader so eager to do so little for public health," Schakowsky said.

"Thanks to the deep pockets of President Bush's mining and chemical industry friends, the United States has the same arsenic drinking water standard as Bangladesh at 50 ppb. This Administration is willing to risk the health of millions to pay back the special interests," Schakowsky added.

The report also found that 10% of groundwater samples collected by the U.S. Geological Survey in 12 Illinois counties, including Cook, Will, and Champaign, contain arsenic concentration above 10ppb. In Cook County, 58,900 people rely on ground water for

drinking water, while the rest of Cook County residents obtain their drinking water from Lake Michigan. While the threat exists, tests have shown that arsenic levels in Cook County drinking water are below 10 ppb.

"I am here at Foster Beach with environmentalists to draw a line in the sand. Fortunately, Lake Michigan water does not pose a threat, but we don't think anyone should be endangered from drinking their tap water," Schakowsky said.

Schakowsky cautioned that this delay by the Bush Administration could lead to more communities serving their customers drinking water above 10ppb. That is why she is an original cosponsor of H.R. 1413, legislation that would make the 10ppb the law of the land, while providing states millions of dollars through the Safe Drinking Water Revolving Fund to help bring them into compliance and improve water quality monitoring technology.

"We're not going to stand idly by while the Bush Administration interferes with sound science and public health. Safe drinking water is nonnegotiable and we'll make that clear to the Administration through legislation and pressure from citizens, organizations, and communities," Schakowsky concluded.

The Special Investigations Division of the Minority Staff of the Committee on Government Reform prepared the report. Schakowsky is a member of the Committee.