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PUBLIC NOT BUYING BUSH'S SNAKE OIL
Op-ed by Schakowsky in the *Chicago Sun-Times*

CHICAGO, IL -- By the end of this week, President Bush will have visited nine cities, including Chicago, in 14 days in search of nationwide support of his mammoth tax cut proposal. Think about that: a president having to work so hard to sell a tax cut. How can that be? The answer is simple.

The American people aren't buying because they know that the meaningful cuts are going to the rich and that nothing will be left over for what they really care about: protecting Social Security and Medicare, improving health care, fixing crumbling schools and reducing the debt.

Besides, the sensible American people have no faith in the crystal ball that is projecting the huge surpluses on which the Bush tax-cut-for-the-rich is based. They're just not inclined to bet the farm on predictions made by the same crew that was off by a cool half a trillion dollars between 1999 and 2000.

Unwilling to compromise, Bush wants Congress to pass his 10-year tax cut that will end up costing us \$ 2.6 trillion and gives 43 percent of the benefits to the richest 1 percent of taxpayers, even though they only pay 21 percent of all federal taxes. Is it any wonder that regular folks can't swallow this tax package, including a repeal of the estate tax that gives as much in tax reductions to the 4,500 largest estates as it gives to 142 million Americans?

What kind of tax relief would hardworking families get under Bush's plan? In many instances, they would get nothing, zip, goose egg. One-third of low- and moderate-income families with children would not receive any tax reductions under the Bush plan, according to Citizens for Tax Justice. In Illinois, 482,000 families and 985,000 children would not benefit. For example, a couple with one child making \$ 20,000 or a couple with three children making \$ 26,000 get zero benefits under the Bush plan.

For many of us in Washington, and across the country, the president's proposal is a non-starter. In order to help his rich friends, Bush is willing to ravage basic priorities. An analysis of his tax plan found that the wealthiest 1 percent will receive \$ 774 billion over 10 years. Many Americans can think of more important ways to spend that kind of money: \$ 736 billion would give seniors a really high-quality prescription drug plan under Medicare; \$ 185 billion would lower class size for our children and modernize their schools; \$ 315 billion ensures that Medicaid would cover 12 million adults and children who are now struggling daily without health care.

Members of the president's own party have questioned that kind of budgetary wisdom.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) said last week that it would be "very hard to live on" this budget and added that Congress and the administration have different spending priorities.□

Nonetheless, Republican leaders in the House will stop at nothing to give the president the tax cut that he so much desires. They just rammed through the first major installment of the gigantic \$ 2.6 trillion tax plan even before Congress had an opportunity to set its budget priorities. No family would think of handling their own finances that way.□

Instead of giving the surplus to the rich, we should use surplus dollars to make sound investments and target tax relief to low-income and middle-income families. Like any business or any family, we need to get our financial house in order and plan wisely. The Bush plan to fund tax breaks for the wealthy for the next 10 years and beyond no matter what makes no sense. No wonder it's such a hard sell. This package should be marked "Return to Sender."