

FEBRUARY 5, 2001

STATEMENT OF U.S. REPRESENTATIVE JAN SCHAKOWSKY IN HONOR OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH

CHICAGO, IL - On Election Day 2000, the African American community proved the pundits wrong when millions of black voters went to the voting booths and exercised their constitutional right to vote. It was a right that cost many lives and many years to win.

Now, it is February 2001, Black History Month, and millions of African American voters are angry, and rightfully so. They believe that their vote did not count because they were turned away from the polling place; they were unfairly targeted; and they were not allowed to fully exercise their constitutional right during the election.

This year's Black History Month is not just an opportunity to celebrate the rich traditions, the heroes, and the accomplishments of the African American community, but a real chance to demand accountability, answers and action from elected officials.

For years, the African American community has contributed so much to our nation, and in return, received too little, for too long. The struggle for the most basic of American rights, the right to vote, was finally achieved. And the passage of the Voting Rights Act provides the promise that that right is protected and never taken away. But we must act to turn the promise into reality.

The struggle to achieve true justice and equality continues in 2001. America witnessed the rise of young men and women like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, Barbara Jordan and John Lewis, who became heroes, inspired the nation, and laid the foundation for the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. I am certain that today's heroes will help shepherd the Voting Rights Act of the new millennium, and I will proudly join and lend my efforts.

In his farewell address to the nation, President Clinton said *"America cannot lead in the world unless here at home we weave the threads of our coat of many colors into the fabric of one America."*

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ether, we can achieve that perfect union.