

## **U.S. rep: Activism can get results**

### **Schakowsky tells success stories; says small groups influence policy and effect changes within society**

By Jennifer Leopoldt  
The Daily Northwestern

Using humorous anecdotes and serious observations, U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky told about 90 people about the importance of activism Wednesday afternoon at the Allen Center.

"A small number of people can make a difference," said Schakowsky, D-Ill. She represents the ninth district, which includes Evanston and Skokie.

Schakowsky's speech was sponsored by the Institute for Policy Research as part of its distinguished public policy lecture series.

People with a goal can affect public policy, Schakowsky said. She told of how she and a group of friends began checking the freshness of food at grocery stores in 1969. Their project grew, and through inspecting stores and publishing pamphlets, Schakowsky's group made stores put freshness dates on products.

Schakowsky said the group's success changed her perception of what she could accomplish, and she emphasized that she and her fellow advocates made a large social impact without having any political training.

"We were the real thing - authentic, suburban housewives," she said.

Another of her projects was to go to Chicago's office of the Immigration and Naturalization Services and monitor how the agency dealt with customers.

Officials began to send people home after they had waited in line for more than three hours, and a guard told Schakowsky, "Move or go to jail!"

Because she was looking for problems, Schakowsky said she rejoiced at the harsh treatment she received from the guard.

"You always want to rely on your enemy to do the wrong thing at the right time," she said.

Schakowsky also addressed the problem of low voter turnout. She said politicians need aggressive strategies to engage voters.

"People don't vote, even those who care, because they believe they can't influence the outcome of public policy issues," she said.

Other people do not vote because politicians fail to address issues that resonate with them, Schakowsky said.

"Politicians themselves contribute to the lack of public involvement by misreading what people want," she said.

Schakowsky also said some people underestimate the impact small groups can have, instead believing that only money matters in government.

"People power still trumps money power every day of the week," she said.

Schakowsky said civic involvement has spiked since Sept. 11, and she is waiting to see whether the trend will continue. She said people often want to work with the government for the public good.

"I believe there is a longing to be connected, and when we Americans are connected, there is nothing we can't do," she said.

Most people said they enjoyed the presentation, but Lisa Zelljadt, a Weinberg junior, said she questioned Schakowsky's idea that people power could win out over big money.

"I don't think that's necessarily true these days," Zelljadt said.

But Palatine resident Jeff Borgardt, 23, said he thought the discussion of activism and enacting change was inspiring.

"It's definitely something people can get excited about," he said.

Ruth Prale, a 70-year-old Chicago resident, said she though Schakowsky's speech could spur others to activism.

"She offered concrete ways for us to move forward, to better society - that's what it's all about," Prale said.