

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE (LETTER)

Answering the Many Questions

About Haiti

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, (D-III)

March 11, 2004

This is regarding "Helping Haiti heal" (Editorial, March 2). I couldn't agree more with the portion of your editorial that says it's time for the international community, including the United States, "to commit to fixing Haiti, and to stay engaged until the task is accomplished."

But the Tribune's contemptuous attitude toward those of us in Congress who dare to question the Bush administration's role in the Haitian coup is hard to understand. The Tribune may want to dismiss out of hand, without any investigation whatsoever, the possibility that the administration removed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide against his will. But one would think, after Secretary of State Colin Powell's United Nations testimony on weapons of mass destruction, that a closer look at the evidence might be reasonable.

Powell clearly stated that the U.S. was not seeking the removal of Aristide. On Feb. 21, Aristide agreed to a power-sharing proposal made by CARICOM, the United States and France. It was the opposition, led by former death squad leaders, convicted murderers and drug dealers--referred to as "rebels" by the Tribune--that said no, not once, but twice. They wanted nothing less than Aristide out--dead or alive.

In the end, the U.S. allowed the likes of Guy Philippe to create an impossible situation for Aristide. Philippe, a man suspected by U.S. officials of drug trafficking, was given the last word on Aristide's ability to serve out his term as Haiti's democratically elected president. Given our own flawed 2000 presidential election, I find it almost laughable that the flawed 2000 Haitian election is given as a compelling reason to abandon Aristide.

It is widely agreed that even a small U.S. or international security force led by the United States could have stopped the violence and given space to diplomatic negotiations and eventually a long-term plan to heal Haiti. But it didn't happen. Why?

Yes we need to move forward to heal Haiti. But aren't the American people entitled to know what role their government played in this mess next door?