

Letter to the Editor

Chicago Sun-Times (3/3/04)

U.S. Lets Haiti Down

The Sun-Times, in its March 1 editorial, applauds the Bush administration for its policy on Haiti, saying it was "correct in declining to prop up Aristide." The Sun-Times thinks it is correct for the United States to start a war in Iraq to bring democracy and freedom to that country, but not correct to protect the first democratically elected president of the most impoverished country in our hemisphere from the terrorists -- yes, terrorists -- who were determined to get him out, dead or alive. Forgive me if I can't follow that logic.

In a democracy one does not take up arms against an elected president. His life is not threatened, nor is he forced out of the country. Nor are convicted murderers and drug dealers and armed thugs welcomed in to do the dirty work. In a democracy, one goes from elected president to elected president, not coup d'etat to coup d'etat.

President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's term was to expire in 2005. According to the Haitian Constitution, he was not eligible to run again. Even so, to stop the violence, Aristide agreed on Feb. 21 to a power-sharing proposal made by CARICOM, the United States and France. The opposition, led by former death squad leaders, convicted murderers and drug dealers, flatly said no. They wanted nothing less than Aristide out -- dead or alive.

The Bush administration sided with the murderers. While it is unclear exactly what happened early Sunday, the message from the United States to Aristide was crystal clear: The United States won't protect you from being killed by the assassins that are on your doorstep.

Now that the elected president is out, the United States is in, and the Sun-Times says "the democratic process in Haiti -- such as it is" can begin operating again. Whether Bush or the Sun-Times liked him or not, there was a democratically elected president in Haiti. Now there is no legitimate government in Haiti. Aristide's and Haiti's crisis tested our commitment to democracy, and we failed the test.

Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-III.)