Congresswoman to visit U.S. detainees

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Amy McLaughlin - **Daily Herald**

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky will join a congressional delegation on a one-day trip Saturday to check on conditions at U.S. detention facilities in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Schakowsky, an Evanston Democrat whose district includes most of Des Plaines, will join members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission to meet with officials at the U.S. Naval Base where about 650 prisoners are being held.

The detainees are being held there as part of the United States' ongoing war on terrorism.

Delegation members say they want to make sure prisoners are being treated in a humane way.

"There's been a lot of international criticism, by human rights organizations at home and abroad," Schakowsky said.

"I wanted to go see for myself the condition of the 650 prisoners there," she said.

The trip will be led by U.S. Rep. Chris Smith, a New Jersey Republican who is the chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, also known as the Commission on Security and Cooperation in

Europe.

The commission was created in 1976 by Congress to monitor diplomatic efforts and human rights issues and prevent conflicts in 55 nations that participate in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Schakowsky said many of the prisoners have been held there in small cells for more than a year. She said she'd like to see what evidence U.S. officials have for holding them.

She said it violates this country's requirement of due process and the rules for international prisoners set by the Geneva Convention.

"I just find it very chilling that the United States would not demonstrate more concern for the rights of these prisoners," Schakowsky said.

Members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe adopted a resolution in July criticizing the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay.