

Schakowsky gives students her take on 9/11 attacks

BY MIKE ISAACS

Skokie Review, December 13, 2001

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-9th) calls it "a fascinating and difficult time" to be a politician in Washington D.C. since Sept. 11.

Schakowsky Monday spent about an hour with Niles North High School students briefly touching on many of the ramifications of the terrorist attacks.

She has been one of the more outspoken critics of the Bush Administration's policies since Sept. 11 - from voting against the Patriot Act, which extends law enforcement powers in the wake of the attacks, to opposing secret military tribunals for foreigners linked to terrorism.

"One of the most frustrating results about Sept. 11 is that everything we discuss now is wrapped in the flag," Schakowsky said. "Suddenly, the attitude is that if you're questioning things, you're not patriotic or willing to stand behind the president."

Schakowsky cited the debate over drilling for oil in Alaska. She opposes drilling in Alaska even though there appears to be a push for that position since the attacks.

"It's a bad idea," she said. "I'm for finding alternative sources. I'm concerned right now that everything we discuss is tinted in red, white and blue and is used to stymie debate in this country."

For Schakowsky, just the opposite should be occurring.

Dressed in Niles North's vivid school colors of purple and white, Schakowsky appeared at the school Monday as part of its Seminars for Scholars program. Teachers and counselors recommend students for special presentations that usually address issues prominent in public debate.

"Our programs are known for having a great impact on students," said program sponsor Isaac Hoffman. About 120 students were recommended for Schakowsky's visit and 54 students were selected, Hoffman said.

After Schakowsky finished, the students broke into smaller groups to consider more issues regarding Sept. 11 and made presentations of their own at the end of the seminar.

Schakowsky in her 50-minute visit Monday talked to students about Americans feeling more vulnerable now because of Sept. 11. Heightened security has become part of the norm and people are starting to get used to it, she said.

"You do get used to the changes," she said. "Today, unfortunately, we don't have many visitors in the White House or the Capitol Building. It's amazing how you get used to these things."

Following Sept. 11, Schakowsky joined most of her fellow congressmen in voting to allow Bush to use force in Afghanistan. "But there's still a lot of controversy about our role in using force," she said.

Schakowsky criticized U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft for his comments regarding politicians and others who have questioned giving too much leniency to law enforcement, one of

the reasons she voted against the Patriot Act. Ashcroft called such criticism "dangerous and un-American" and claimed it provided support to the enemy.

"I felt what the Patriot Act did was put too much power in the hands of law enforcement not only to snoop but to detain people," she said.

Schakowsky also outlined other positions related to the war on terrorism.

More needs to be done against bio-terrorism, she said. "Our public health system is not really in shape for a bio-terrorist attack. We've found the health infrastructure lacking."

The terrorist attacks may have a negative impact on immigration policies and make it harder for people to get visas. An amnesty program for illegal immigrants the congresswoman supported could be "off the table," she said.

The war on terrorism costs at least \$1 billion a month or more. Schakowsky said one of her great concerns is how to find necessary funding for needs in this country.

Schakowsky was against the bail out for the airline industry, which she said offered no help to laid off employees or those who needed the help the most. Sept. 11 was an excuse to lay off employees the airline industry was already planning on laying off, although maybe not as many, she said.

The United States must remain concerned about Afghanistan even after the war ends - especially with the track record of the Northern Alliance, Schakowsky said. More than one million children are in danger of starvation there now.