

Schakowsky pushes bioterrorism bill News-Star

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Before the terrorists get better at spreading disease, U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-9th) said, she wants our government to dedicate more money to fighting the threat.

Speaking at a Nov. 6 news conference in front of Uptown's Neighborhood Health Center, Schakowsky stood with Dr. Quentin Young, former president of the American Public Health Association, to announce that she will introduce a Bioterrorism Protection Act that would provide \$7 billion to respond to health and security threats.

Schakowsky, a member of the Democrats' Homeland Security Task Force, expressed special interest in the health dimensions of the terrorists' threat when she was appointed to the task force last month.

Schakowsky said her proposal includes \$3.5 billion for public-health infrastructure.

"Our public-health and medical systems are already operating on a thin margin," she said. "The flu season alone can create serious challenges. Now we must be able to respond to ongoing health-care needs and be prepared to handle chemical accidents, truck bombs, planes used as missiles, or outbreaks of anthrax and biological diseases. And we must be able to respond in all parts of the country at all times."

Of the \$3.5 billion for infrastructure:

? \$1.4 billion would be for stockpiling anthrax antibiotics and smallpox vaccines and to develop new medicines and vaccines.

? \$1 billion would go to training and education of first-response teams, to beef up community emergency response.

? \$600 million would go to local authorities to develop emergency-response plans and improve intergovernmental communication.

? \$500 million would be earmarked to improve or build communications systems and ensure these are connected to the Center for Disease Control, as well as to train doctors and nurses in the detection of bioterrorism events.

Of the balance of the \$7 billion, \$725 million would go to keeping food supplies safe and free of contamination. Another \$75 million would do the same for the water supply.

She would have the government spend \$870 million on preparing law-enforcement agencies to deal with health attacks, by providing for expanded authority over toxins, establishment of new criminal offenses to deal with the threat, securing the border, including sea port of dangerous biological and chemical agents, and addressing the threat to the mail system.

Additionally, \$1.1 billion would be dedicated to intelligence gathering and \$720 million to

prepare the armed forces to coordinate with each other and help with the response to a biological terror attack.

It can't wait, said Schakowsky. "We cannot guarantee public health and safety with half-way measures, and we cannot do it on the cheap," she said.

She said the \$175 million proposed by President Bush for the upgrading of state and local public health response is not enough.

"Many local health departments and community health providers are greatly under-funded, face critical shortages and do not have Internet capacity or even fax machines, meaning that they cannot be informed of potential emergencies, nor given response instructions on a timely basis" she said.

Schakowsky planned to introduce her bill last week.