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SCHAKOWSKY RAISES MAJOR CONCERNS ABOUT PROPOSED \$1.6 BILLION AID PACKAGE TO COLUMBIA

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today expressed grave concerns about the \$1.6 billion in proposed aid to Columbia. During a hearing of the Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources, Schakowsky questioned the current U.S. policy of investing billions of dollars in a military drug war that has yielded little or no results.

"From 1990 to 1998, we spent \$625 million in Columbia and here is what we got: a 50% increase in coca production," Schakowsky said.

"Considering the demonstrated failure of militarized eradication efforts to date, why should we believe that we would achieve results by increasing the amount we already spend? What will it take to achieve victory in Columbia and are we prepared to make that commitment in dollars and lives?" she asked during today's hearing.

Schakowsky also said that the involvement by our government in this conflict could draw the U.S. into Columbia's civil war. She specifically pointed to a recent Op-ed by former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador Robert White, where he stated that our current intervention in Columbia is reminiscent of the U.S. failed policies in El Salvador and Vietnam. Schakowsky has invited Ambassador White to brief her colleagues on the Colombian situation.

Furthermore, Schakowsky expressed concern that the aid package does not include adequate accountability measures even though the Colombian armed forces have been linked to human rights abuses and paramilitary groups. More than 100,000 people have died in Columbia's civil war.

"We must find more innovative approaches to cut drug use. We know that each dollar spent on treatment here at home is 23 more times effective than eradication," Schakowsky said. She pointed to a recent report by the RAND Corporation which found that providing treatment to cocaine users is ten times more effective than drug interdiction schemes and 23 times more effective than eradicating coca at its source.