

SPEECH OF
HON. JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY
OF ILLINOIS
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2003

- Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about a silent killer lurking among us and our children. That killer comes in the form of food-borne illnesses and affects 76 million people each year. Of those individuals, approximately 325,000 will be hospitalized and more than 5,000 will die. While many adults will be fortunate to avoid the devastating, lasting effects of food-borne illness, our children are especially vulnerable and comprise nearly 40 percent of the victims.
- Each day, more than 27 million children eat lunches provided through the National School Lunch Act. Despite increased attention in recent years to the safety of those meals provided to our school children, there is evidence of serious problems with our school lunch system. Between 1990 and 2000, there were nearly 100 reported outbreaks of food-borne illness in schools affecting thousands of children, many of them resulting in significant health consequences.
- I attended a hearing last year examining food safety standards in our schools and found significant gaps in how we protect our children from these dangerous illnesses. Only 17 percent of the food served in our schools is subject to stringent United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) safety guidelines for dangerous pathogens. Safety histories of the companies that supply food to our schools are not being shared with the school officials who purchase the food. If the USDA or FDA quickly announce that a manufacturer has produced tainted food, states often have no way to determine if they have that food in their schools' kitchens due to a complex web of food manufacturers, distributors and brokers. The federal government has no authority to mandate the recall of contaminated foods sold to schools.
- Today, along with Congresswoman **ROSA DELAURO**, I am introducing a bill that will address these concerns. The Safe School Food Act incorporates USDA safety guidelines into school procurement contracts to the maximum extent possible, giving the Secretary of Agriculture authority to require pathogen testing of foods purchased by schools, providing state education agencies with current vendor information, developing effective methods to share supplier safety information with schools, allowing for mandatory recall of any tainted food, and providing districts with tools and information on how to more safely prepare food served to our children.
- Our food supply has been identified as a possible target of terrorists and we need to protect it and protect our children. This is a very serious issue and we must do all we can to ensure the safety of our children.
- I urge my colleagues to support the Safe School Food Act and support the well-being of our children.