

May 05 - 2005 - Rep. Slaughter Addresses Republican Abuse of Power in Iraq Spending Bill

Rep. Slaughter Addresses Republican Abuse of Power in Iraq Spending Bill

Members of Congress Forced to Swallow Poison Pill

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Rules, today led debate on the rule concerning the supplemental Iraqi War Appropriations Bill. Citing the Republican Majority's decision to include the unrelated and controversial "Real I.D." immigration legislation in a bill intended to help our troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, Rep. Slaughter delivered the following remarks focusing attention on yet another Republican abuse of power:

Rep. Slaughter's Comments:

I think we can all agree that supporting our young men and women in uniform is a priority for each and every member in this House.

Whether we are Democrats or Republicans, whether we have agreed with the Bush administration's reasons for going to war in Iraq or opposed them, we all want the United States to be successful in the Middle East.

We may disagree on how we overcome the challenges that lay before us, just as our founding fathers hoped and expected we would. But all of us here are patriots. And all of us come to the table with our best intentions in mind.

Our troops in uniform throughout Afghanistan and Iraq have consistently performed their duty with courage and with great integrity.

It is incumbent upon us here in the people's House to honor those sacrifices in the only real way we can, by providing leadership for this nation that is as principled and courageous as each of our fallen soldiers.

We have a responsibility to live up to their example and have the courage to perform our duty with integrity.

We must insist on accountability and honesty in this government, as we too must always be honest and accountable.

But I fear that, in this body, in this Congress, we have not yet risen to that challenge.

I was reminded of that just yesterday, as I noticed a picture which adorns one of the hallways here in our Capitol. The photo commemorated a group of Americans who served their country in a bygone era. A proud group of individuals whose work helped to win World War II. Despite the fact that they never set foot on a battlefield, there can be no doubt that their impact on the war effort was enormous.

Under the picture there is a caption that states how the Truman Commission saved the taxpayers of this country millions of dollars during World War II by ferreting out waste and corruption in the American war effort.

The commission's purpose was to maximize every dollar we had to spend, to ferret out corruption and mismanagement, and to infuse a sense of accountability into the American war machine.

By all accounts they were successful in their noble endeavor, their good work saved many American lives by ensuring that our tax dollars were spent where they needed to be spent- on winning the war...one more helmet, one more bullet, one more tank...It made a difference.

And yet, we in this Congress don't have the courage to insist on the same level of accountability today that our forefathers saw fit to employ over 60 years ago.

When this same supplemental was brought before the House earlier this year, Mr. Tierney, offered an amendment that would have established a select committee to follow up on a very disturbing report which had been released from the Inspector General's office.

The report indicated that \$9 billion of money spent on Iraqi reconstruction was unaccounted for. And for those of you counting out there, that is nine- thousand- million dollars.

We heard reports of payroll checks being cut for employees who didn't exist and firms being compensated for providing security for flights that never took off.

We even heard a report that a Pentagon contract for the development of bullet proof armor was given to a former Army researcher who never delivered single piece of armor.

These types of incidents squander precious resources, waste time we often do not have and even worse, they place American lives at risk.

But the Majority in this House defeated our attempts to bring a measure of accountability into this process.

And today, months later, that 9 billion dollars is still missing and none of those incidents I just mentioned have been investigated.

And still today, we have no Truman Commission of our own to speak of and there is still no language in this conference report that will create one.

The question I have for my colleagues today is, why not?

Surely, the leadership of this House understands how the missing 9 billion dollars of taxpayer money could benefit our troops- had we the sense to go look for it.

And without any oversight commission to investigate and prevent the misuse of taxpayer dollars by the pentagon or some unscrupulous government contractors...how can we be sure the 82 billion dollar check we are cutting today on behalf of American taxpayers will actually reach its destination or be used to protect our troops in the line of fire?

After all, it is our young men and women in uniform who pay the price for the inability of this body to enforce any standard of accountability.

But this isn't the only failure of accountability we can see here today. All one has to do is open a newspaper this morning and read that Dr. Ahmed Chalabi has been named the Deputy Prime Minister and Acting Oil Minister in the provisional government in Iraq.

Do I have to remind this House that just months ago Dr. Chalabi was under intense scrutiny for feeding the U.S. government bad intelligence, which ultimately led us to invade Iraq? Do I have to remind my colleagues that just months ago Dr. Chalabi was suspected of passing U.S. intelligence to the Iranian government? Can anyone possibly explain how this man has been allowed to accept such a high ranking position in the Iraqi provisional government?

We know what should be in this bill, language to create a modern version of the Truman Commission, so we can ensure that men like Ahmed Chalabi don't undermine the war and reconstruction effort, place American soldiers at risk and rob American taxpayers blind as we continue to pump more and more money into Iraq.

But I want to touch on what shouldn't be in this bill.

This majority believes in instituting a national identification card program for this country, something I and many of my colleagues here strongly oppose.

Creating a National Identification card is serious business and could have profound implications for all Americans.

It should be debated on this floor openly with opportunity for ample discussion and amendment.

Instead, this leadership has shoved this extreme measure down our throats as a part of this supplemental, knowing full well that many members would never support the measure in its current form, will be forced to vote for it because they want to support our troops.

That's not accountability that is arrogance.

How dare you hide behind our men and women in uniform.

As these brave souls are risking their lives everyday to protect us from danger, how can the leadership of this body use them to protect themselves and their agenda from debate, from democracy and from accountability?

This is just the latest example of this arrogant majority refusing to accept accountability for its actions, and for its agenda.

Members should be aware that this rule contains a section that authorizes the Judiciary Committee to file a supplemental report on H.R. 748, The Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act.

You may recall that during the markup of H.R. 748 in the Judiciary Committee last month, five defeated Democratic amendments were included in the committee report with descriptions that blatantly and grossly mischaracterized the amendments.

While the rule will provide for a supplemental report to be filed, it does not require or direct the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee to apologize to the authors of those amendments.

So, just as this leadership concedes the issue and recognizes that action must be taken; they still will not accept responsibility for their actions.

I guess the minority is expected to be grateful for this small token, but it would mean much more if those responsible for maligning our colleagues here in this house, would accept responsibility for their actions, fix the report and apologize.

I am going to support this conference report because I want to be supportive of our troops abroad.

But it has to be noted that this leadership is using our brave men and women and this supplemental as a tool to cover for... not only their underhanded attempt to institute a national identification card but also for last week's misguided abuse of power that maligned several of our colleagues.

At the same time, they have failed to infuse much needed accountability into this process.

This is not the principled leadership we owe to the men and women that this bill is supposed to protect.

This is not courageous.

We can do better. We owe our fighting men and women at least that much.