

May 05 2005 - Rep. Slaughter Calls for Creation of "Truman" Commission for Iraq

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Lambastes Republicans over Refusal to Ensure Accountability in the Post-War Reconstruction Effort

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Rules, spoke strongly today of American reconstruction efforts in Iraq and against the waste and corruption which is undermining them and endangering the lives and safety of U.S. troops.

"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," Rep. Slaughter said. "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."

"It is for this reason," she continued, "that I am so disappointed by the refusal of the majority in this House to aggressively pursue the mismanagement and fraud which is sapping the resources from the very soldiers we are charged to support and protect."

In early 2005, a report issued by the Special Inspector General for the Iraqi Reconstruction found that \$9 billion spent on the Iraqi reconstruction was unaccounted for. For months before this, accusations of price gouging by Halliburton had been gaining momentum, as the public has gradually become aware that the White House-connected corporation had been overcharging the U.S. Army for gasoline in order to inflate their profits by millions of dollars. Nor has the situation improved, with recent reports showing that yet another \$100 million earmarked between 2003 and 2004 for small building projects throughout Iraq is still completely unaccounted for, much of it likely lost to fraud.

"We have 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," Ms. Slaughter said. "We have 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 a single piece of armor. We need to stop this destructive self-interest now."

"During World War II, the efforts of our forces were helped greatly by the work of the Truman Commission," Congresswoman Slaughter continued, "which made sure that the money being spent on the War was winding up where it was supposed to and was being used in responsible ways. 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."

Democratic members of the House have on numerous occasions attempted to promote accountability in the reconstruction effort, seeking to reconstitute a committee like the Truman Commission to better manage and monitor U.S. funds and contracts associated with Iraq. Republican members of Congress, however, have repeatedly refused to agree to the creation of such a group, and have actively worked to oppose it.

"The same lack of respect for ethical conduct and responsible governance which the Majority has brought to the floor of the House regarding domestic issues has now infected its conduct of American foreign policy," Ms. Slaughter said. "Its arrogance has already jeopardized the well-being of the American people. Now it is jeopardizing the safety of those young men and women fighting half a world away on our behalf."

"We should be ashamed that we have yet to eliminate the corruption that is forcing our troops to fight with one hand tied behind their back," Ms. Slaughter added. "Let us immediately bring back a modern incarnation of the Truman Commission so that we can give our troops the best chance for success that they can have."