

May 05, 2005 - Remarks on Iraq Supplemental Conference Report

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Rule for H.R. 1268, Conference Report Emergency Supplemental Appropriations

Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Tsunami Relief Act, 2005

Mr. Speaker, I think we can all agree that supporting our young men and women in uniform is a priority for each and every Member of 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 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 as 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, and we, too, must always be accountable and honest.

But I fear that in this body, in this Congress, we have not risen to that challenge. Yesterday, while walking through the Senate halls, I saw a picture of Senator Harry Truman conducting a meeting of the Truman Commission, and under that picture there is a statement that says that the Truman Commission saved the taxpayers of the country millions of dollars during the Second World War by ferreting out waste and corruption in the American war effort. And let me remind my colleagues that Senator Truman was investigating his own administration.

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 on where they needed to be spent, on winning the war. One more helmet, one more bullet, one more tank, it made the difference.

And yet we in this Congress do not 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, the gentleman from Massachusetts (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 who are counting out there, that is 9,000 million dollars. We heard reports of payroll checks covering employees who did not 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 a single piece of armor.

These types of incidents squander precious resources, waste time we do not have, and, worse, they place our American soldiers' lives at risk. But the majority in the House defeated our attempts to bring a measure of accountability into the process. And today, 9 months later, that \$9 billion is still missing and none of those incidents I have just mentioned have been investigated, none of them.

And still today we have no Truman Commission of our own to speak of and 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 the House understands that missing \$9 billion of taxpayer money could benefit our troops had we the sense to go and look for it. And without any oversight commission to investigate and prevent the issues of taxpayer dollars by the Pentagon or some unscrupulous government contractors, how can we be sure that the \$82 billion check we are cutting today on behalf of the 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 is not the only failure of accountability we see here today. All one had to do was open a newspaper this morning and read that Dr. Ahmed Chalabi, who was honored by sitting there with the first lady in the State of the Union Address, has been named the deputy prime minister of the country and the 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 the bill: language to create a modern version of the Truman Commission so we can ensure that men like Chalabi do not 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 now I want to touch on what should not be in the bill. The majority believes in instituting a national identification card program for the country, which is in the legislation. Creating a national identification card is serious business and could have profound implications for all Americans. It should be debated on the floor openly with opportunity for ample discussion and amendment. Instead, the leadership has shoved this extreme measure down our throats as part of the supplemental, knowing full well that many Members would never support the measure in its current form but will be forced to vote for it because we want to support our troops. That is not accountability; that is arrogance.

How dare they hide behind our men and women in uniform as the brave souls risk their lives every day to protect us from

danger. How could the leadership of this body use them to protect themselves and their agenda from debate, from democracy, and accountability? This is just the latest example of misuse of power.

Members should be aware that the rule contains a section that authorizes the Committee on the Judiciary to file a supplemental report on H.R. 748, the Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act. Members may recall that during the markup of H.R. 748 in Committee on the Judiciary last month, five defeated Democrat 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 Committee on the Judiciary to apologize to the authors of the amendments, nor are we sure that it will never happen again.

So just as the leadership concedes the issue and recognizes action must be taken, they are still not accepting the responsibility. I am sure we are supposed to be grateful for this small token, but it would mean much more if those responsible for maligning our colleagues here in the House would accept the responsibility for their actions and fix the report.

I am going to support the conference report because I am supportive of my troops abroad, but it has to be noted that our brave men and women are being used as a tool to cover for the underhanded attempt to institute a national ID card, but also for last week's misguided use of power that maligned several of our colleagues. At the same time, they have failed to infuse the much-needed accountability into the process. This is not the principled leadership we owe the men and women the bill is supposed to protect. This is not courageous. We can do better. We owe our fighting men and women at least that much.