

## September 18, 2006 - At Home and Abroad, Administration Puts Cronyism Before Competence

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, September 18, 2006

At Home and Abroad, Administration Puts Cronyism Before Competence  
New Revelations Concerning CPA Appointments Reveal a White House that Prizes Loyalty Above All Else

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today issues the following statement following new reports concerning Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) staffing appointments made during the critically important initial months of the Iraq War:

"To this Administration, nothing is free from the corrupting effects of cronyism, politicization, and partisanship," Rep. Slaughter said. "For years, federal agencies in the United States have been undermined by politically motivated decision-making, and have been handed over to individuals whose main qualification is their ideological allegiance to the President. And the same rules have always applied in Iraq."

"This White House has said that the fight to rebuild Iraq is part of a war for civilization. And yet, Mr. Bush refuses to allow the most competent people to administer that fight. Instead, he has turned over critical tasks time and again to men and women who have neither the knowledge nor ability to complete them competently. As a result, the situation in Iraq has remained on the brink of collapse for years, and the lives of our troops and the Iraqi people have been put in needless danger."

"Simply put, for this Administration, nothing is more important than the promotion of its friends and political allies," Rep. Slaughter said. "It is one of the most egregious sets of priorities I have ever witnessed."

The Congresswoman's comments came in response to recent reports of the ways in which high-ranking officials in the CPA were selected during the early days of the Iraq war.

An article by Washington Post reporter Rajiv Chandrasekaran published this past Sunday outlined in detail how:

- All applicants to positions within the CPA were screened by Jim O'Beirne, a Pentagon official responsible for assessing Defense Department appointments and who routinely asked applicants to express their views on President Bush, the methods being employed by the Administration to counter terrorism, and on highly political (and unrelated) issues such as Roe v. Wade.

- The resuscitation of the Iraqi Stock Exchange was put in the hands of a 24-year old, Jay Hallen, with no background in finance, but who had applied to work at the White House.

- A top career public health official, Dr. Fredrick M. Burkle Jr., was replaced as the head of Iraq's public health system by an appointee, James K. Haveman Jr., whose main qualification was his political ties to the former Republican governor of Michigan and his tenure as the head of a faith-based health organization. Dr. Burkle, whose extensive medical education was matched by years of relevant experience gained from operating in war-torn areas, had been described by a colleague as "the single most talented and experienced post-conflict health specialist working for the United States government."

- The task of rebuilding the Iraqi police force was given to Bernard Kerik, the former police commissioner for New York City. Mr. Kerik spent much of his energy during his brief tour in Iraq going out on nighttime police raids with U.S. soldiers, meaning that he was asleep during the day when the majority of the work his position required took place.

- Iraq's \$13 billion budget was turned over to the daughter of a top neoconservative pundit and a man who had recently graduated from an evangelical university, neither of whom had studied accounting.

Mr. Chandrasekaran's article is titled "Ties to GOP Trumped Know-How Among Staff Sent to Rebuilding Iraq," and was published as part of the Sunday, September 17th edition of the Washington Post.

#### FURTHER BACKGROUND ON PARTISANSHIP AND CRONYISM IN THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

This week's revelations follow a long history of cronyism trumping competence in the Bush Administration. In December of 2005, Rep. Slaughter released the following summary of how partisanship and blind ideology have replaced responsible government in numerous domestic federal agencies, including the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB):

Partisan senior officials driven by extreme right-wing political ideology are now controlling the decision making process in numerous federal government agencies, having shut out impartial, career agency experts and professional staff from their previous positions of influence.

Reports of senior Bush political appointees overruling agency experts and professional staff recommendations on crucial agency decisions are numerous and well documented.

The routine manner in which agency protocol has been abandoned and the recommendations of non-partisan professional staffers overruled indicates the ongoing abuse of power, corruption, and misgovernment within major federal agencies.

Politics and partisanship have come to be valued more than expertise and established law, directly impacting the lives of millions of Americans.

Recent examples of this include:

- DOJ APPOINTEES DISGARDED STAFF CONCLUSIONS THAT THE TEXAS REDISTRICTING PLAN WAS ILLEGAL:

"Reports indicate that senior administration officials overruled Department of Justice staff's finding of Tom DeLay's Texas redistricting plan was illegal. Senior administration officials completely disregarded a memo endorsed by six lawyers and two analysts in the department's voting section, which concluded that the landmark Texas congressional redistricting

plan spearheaded by indicted Rep. Tom DeLay (R) violated the Voting Rights Act. The memo found that Republican lawmakers and state officials who helped craft the redistricting proposal were aware it posed a high risk of being ruled discriminatory compared with other options. [Dan Eggen, "Justice Staff Saw Texas Districting As Illegal," The Washington Post, 12/2/05]

- DOJ EXECUTIVES DISREGARDED STAFF RECOMMENDATION TO REJECT GEORGIA VOTER-ID LAW FOR BEING DISCRIMINATORY:

"The decision to overrule of the DOJ staff's finding is the second example of senior officials at DOJ making questionable decisions concerning voting laws. Less than a month ago another report surfaced detailing how higher-ranking officials at Justice over-ruled department lawyers and analysts' recommendation to reject a voter-identifications law which was likely to discriminate against black voters. [Dan Eggen, "Criticism of Voting Law was Over-Ruled," The Washington Post, 11/17/05]

- TOP FDA OFFICIALS REFUSED TO APPROVE OVER-THE-COUNTER EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION, THOUGH RECOMMENDED BY STAFF:

Just recently, the Government Accountability Office released a "smoking gun" report documenting the reasons behind the Food and Drugs Administration's (FDA) recent refusal to approve the over-the-counter sale of Plan B emergency contraception. The report found that there were 4 unusual aspects to the FDA's decision in May 2004 to not approve Barr Laboratories' application for over-the-counter sales of Plan B. [11/14/05]

- EXXON-MOBIL LOBBYING THE WHITE HOUSE TO APPOINT HARLAN WATSON, AN OIL INDUSTRY FAVORITE IN CLIMATE CONTROL NEGOTIATIONS:

Oil-industry favorite Harlan Watson is being used to peddle the administration's position on air-pollution policies.

"A Feb. 6, 2001, fax sent to the White House by oil giant Exxon Mobil proposed involving Watson more closely in international climate negotiations. The document -- which Exxon Mobil spokesman Russ Roberts said was sent by the company but not written by any of its employees -- suggested asking House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) to make Watson, who at the time worked for the House Science Committee -- "available to work with the team" of Americans attending international climate change meetings." [Juliet Eilperin, "Climate Official's Work is Questioned," The Washington Post, 12/5/05]

- FORMER CORPORATION OF PUBLIC BROADCASTING CHAIRMAN ILLEGALLY PRESSURED TV STATIONS TO AIR MORE PROGRAMS REFLECTING THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S POLITICAL VIEWS:

Although federal law prohibits the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) from linking its funding for Public Broadcasting System (PBS) stations to their respective programming decisions, the CPB's Inspector General recently concluded that former Chairman Kenneth Tomlinson did just that. The report found that Tomlinson, a Bush appointee and personal friend of Karl Rove, illegally interfered with PBS programming by promoting the conservative talk show, "The Journal Editorial Report," and threatening to withhold funds if PBS executives did not add the show to their broadcast schedules. [Office of Inspector General Kenneth A. Konz, "Review of Alleged Actions Violating The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, as Amended," Corporation for Public Broadcasting Office of Inspector General, 11/15/05]

###