

LARSON: HOUSE IS ABROGATING RESPONSIBILITY TO LOOK INTO PRISON ABUSES

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Committee Votes Down Resolution Requesting Information on the Abuse of Prisoners

WASHINGTON, D.C.- Last night in the House Armed Services Committee, U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-1) voted in favor of a resolution calling on Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to release all documents to Congress related to General Taguba's investigation of Iraqi prison abuses. Larson also voted in favor of amendments that would require the secretary to share any reports on the abuses by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and release other documents related to all prison abuse, including Abu Ghraib.

Rep. Chris Bell (D-TX) introduced the original resolution, while Rep. Tauscher (D-CA) offered the amendment calling for release of the ICRC reports and Rep. Ike Skelton (D-MO, Ranking Member) and Rep. Heather Wilson (R-NM) offered an amendment requesting additional information related to the prisoner abuses. All amendments and the underlying resolution were defeated along partisan lines with the exception of Rep. Wilson's vote. The measure was a "Resolution of Inquiry" and House rules required it to be marked-up in the committee.

"The abuse of Iraqi prisoners occurred while Congress slept, and now the Republican Majority is determined to remain in the dark," said Larson. "Congress must exercise oversight in this area and the GOP Leadership has once again actively abrogated that responsibility. The House should be holding open public hearings to get to the bottom of what happened at Abu Ghraib and every aspect of the situation that allowed the abuses to take place there and elsewhere. Accomplishing that task means that the committee needs to investigate all issues associated with the incident to identify whether or not there are systemic problems that contributed to the environment within which these abuses were allowed to occur. A comprehensive and transparent investigation by Congress would help members assess our position in Iraq, help reestablish U.S. credibility in the eyes of the Iraqi people and the world as well as answer the many questions we receive from our constituents. Instead, we have the media fulfilling the Congress's Constitutional responsibilities."

Skelton's amendment called for the following, within 14 days of passage:

(1) Any documentation of the training received by the 800th Military Police Brigade and its component battalions and companies since January 1, 2002, for its service in Iraq in the areas of detention operations and prisoner treatment.

(2) Any documents for work under contracts including subcontracts and task orders) and all reports on such documents, for interrogation or translation work in Iraq by CACI International, Titan Corporation, and any other corporation that may have performed such work.

(3) All summaries of investigations of the treatment of detainees in Iraq currently pending or already closed that may have been prepared by military investigative services, including the May 5, 2004, synopsis prepared by the Criminal Investigation Command.

(4) Any documents or testimony presented to or prepared by the Detainee Assessment Branch at Abu Ghraib prison at any time during the period from October 2003 to the date of the adoption of this resolution regarding the treatment of Iraqi detainees by members of the Armed Forces or by civilian contractors working in Iraq employed on behalf of the Department of Defense.

(5) Any complaint forms filled out and submitted by a member of the Armed Forces or by a civilian contractor working in Iraq employed on behalf of the Department of Defense regarding the treatment, at any time during the period from March 2003 to the date of the adoption of this resolution, of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison or at any other detention facility in Iraq operated by the United States.

These 5 requests were part of a larger group of 35 specific requests for information on the treatment of prisoners including those at Abu Ghraib being sought by members of the Government Reform Committee, the Judiciary Committee, the Appropriations Committee, the Armed Services Committee, the International Relations Committee, and the Select Committee on Intelligence submitted to the Administration on June 3, 2004. The Administration had not yet responded to this inquiry by the time of the mark-up.

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Larson is a Member of the House Armed Services Committee