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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
June 3, 2004

Today, the ranking Democratic members of the six committees of jurisdiction wrote to President Bush to express our determination to fully and independently investigate the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere. We also requested that President Bush produce key documents so that we can conduct effective oversight.

While the House of Representatives has rightly condemned the illegal and inhumane abuse of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib, it has failed to take the next step. We have failed to conduct a full and public investigation of this terrible episode and of the allegations of prisoner abuse at other locations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay.

Each of us has asked our respective committee chairs to hold bipartisan hearings and investigations. These requests have been rebuffed. No House committee is currently undertaking a formal public investigation into the prisoner abuse.

One Republican leader objected to "jerking those battle field commanders out of Iraq for hearings" even when these same commanders were testifying before the Senate. This Republican chairman insisted that a single public hearing and a few closed meetings amounted to a "massive investigation." Another Republican leader suggested that congressional investigations would inflame hatred of the U.S. by providing "fodder and soundbites for our enemies."

House Republicans seem to think that it is unpatriotic to ask tough questions and demand answers. But congressional oversight is not unpatriotic. Oversight is our constitutional duty.

In order to fulfill this fundamental responsibility, we are launching a joint Democratic investigation into the prisoner abuse in Iraq and elsewhere. We need to find out if the soldiers who tortured and humiliated detainees at Abu Ghraib were acting under orders. We need to find out whether civilian contractors were involved in abusing prisoners. We need to find out whether abuse extended beyond Abu Ghraib or even beyond Iraq. We need to determine whether Administration policies or directives helped to create an atmosphere in which the torture and humiliation of prisoners could occur.

The House of Representatives must not abdicate its responsibility to hold the Administration accountable. We owe it to the Iraqi people, to the American people -- and especially to the U.S. troops that have served with honor -- to learn the whole story and to take steps to ensure that this kind of abuse never again occurs. We cannot allow the Republican leadership's refusal to investigate to prevent us from fulfilling our oversight duties.