Representative Henry A. Waxman

H.R. 1268, Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Tsunami Relief, 2005

February 9, 2006

Mr. Speaker – Time and time again, the Bush Administration has not been straightforward with Congress, the American people, or our soldiers about the costs of this war and what it will take to ensure stability and security in Iraq so our troops can return home.

Instead of disclosing the actual findings of field reports on contracting audits, troop needs, or the projected cost of the reconstruction effort, the Administration has withheld, distorted, and even deliberately hidden information.

Just this week, despite the Administration's refusal to turn Pentagon audits over to Congress, I obtained a report by Defense Department auditors concluding that Halliburton overcharged the US government more than $100 million for a single task order under its no-bid $7 billion contract to restore Iraq's oil infrastructure. I would like to know why unredacted versions of this audit report and the audit reports on nine additional task orders are still being withheld from Congress.

I have also learned that Administration officials violated a U.N. Security Council Resolution by intentionally concealing these overcharges from international auditors. The Administration only provided heavily redacted audits to the international auditors charged with overseeing the Iraqi oil revenue used to pay Halliburton's inflated costs.

Worst of all, correspondence between the Army Corps of Engineers and Halliburton officials indicates it was Halliburton that blacked-out references to egregious overcharges and other key audit findings regarding the unreasonableness of Halliburton's prices.

I am deeply disappointed that the House voted down an amendment calling for the investigation of reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan including contracting procedures, possible money laundering, and profiteering.

It is disturbing that the Republican leadership has been unwilling to assert its oversight responsibility and demand fiscal accountability.

The Administration has not complied with Congressional mandates to provide a comprehensive breakdown of the $200 billion already spent in Iraq and Afghanistan and a detailed assessment of the projected costs of military and reconstruction activities in Iraq over the next 5 years.

The White House has failed to justify a permanent extension of tax cuts for the wealthy while paying for the war with mounting deficits and massive budget cuts to social programs.

And when it comes to our troops, it has been Congress, not the Administration, prioritizing force protection needs and the procurement of safety essentials like armored Humvees, body armor, night vision equipment, and jamming devices to neutralize the improvised explosive devices that are among the biggest threats to US patrols.

I am willing to support this supplemental precisely because it allocates a majority of funds for troop and equipment needs and training of Iraqi security forces. This is a vast improvement over the blank check requested by the Administration to pursue its less accountable reconstruction efforts.

No matter how each of us feels about the Administration's actions that led to war and its conduct since then -- and I have been one of its strongest critics -- we have an obligation to ensure that our troops have the support and equipment they need as long as they are in the field. In addition, the funding in this legislation for training and equipment for Iraqi and Afghan security forces is essential for these nations to take control of their own security so U.S. troops can come home.

Some who oppose this legislation believe that its defeat would hasten the return of our troops. Although it is critically important for the US to develop an exit strategy, I am deeply concerned that a premature withdrawal of US troops just after Iraq's democratic elections and as its leaders attempt the difficult task of forming a coalition government would only embolden the Al-Qaeda cells fueling the insurgency in Iraq.

I also strongly support other provisions of the legislation to pay for food aid and peacekeeping in the Sudan, as well as the more than $650 million allocated for relief and reconstruction to the countries devastated by the tsunami.

I fully support the $200 million included in this bill for economic revitalization and infrastructure development in the West Bank and Gaza. The end of the Arafat era presents a concrete opportunity for the Palestinian people to chart a future away from terrorism, corruption, and incitement and toward democracy, transparency, and the rule of law.

This aid package is a strategic and timely investment in the leadership of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The accountability requirements in this bill will set an example for the international community for formulating assistance packages that protect against cronyism, embezzlement and mismanagement, which in the past siphoned millions of dollars to Arafat loyalists and terrorist organizations.

And so, I will vote for this legislation to support our troops and to support these other worthwhile US humanitarian endeavors, but we have an obligation to hold the Bush Administration accountable for its policies in Iraq.