



Vol. 12, Issue 285 - Friday, October 12, 2007

OUR OPINION

Contractor fraud isn't acceptable in war zone

Unable to get Republican support to bring U.S. troops back from Iraq, congressional Democrats have changed tactics, instead pushing through legislation to correct Bush administration errors in managing the war.

Political considerations, of course, are heavily mixed into their formula. Nonetheless, the measures have value and even though Republicans in the Senate have the numbers to block the bills, they deserve fair hearing and passage.

The House this week overwhelmingly approved a bill by Hawaii Rep. Neil Abercrombie that would expand federal court jurisdiction over U.S. contractors in Iraq to curb profiteering and fraud. At present, no statutes cover such misconduct in the war zone, an oversight that should be rectified.

Administration officials acknowledge fraud by government contractors is a problem, but say it isn't as severe as critics suggest. Losses, they say, probably total in the mere tens of millions of dollars, not in the hundreds of millions or billions of dollars.

Swindling taxpayers for any amount during an expensive war should not be tolerated, especially since no government agency seems to know quite how much has been lost. One audit has identified \$2.7 billion in suspect billings from a single contractor.

Abercrombie notes that another was found guilty of 37 counts of fraud, including false billing, and ordered to pay \$10 million in damages. The fine was overturned because U.S. laws do not apply in Iraq.