

# Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

## “An Oversight Hearing on Contracting Abuses in Iraq”

### Statement of Senator Tom Harkin

September 10, 2004

Thank you, Senator Dorgan.

The Bush administration is notorious for marginalizing Congress, for resisting oversight and sharing as little information as possible. Unfortunately, the Republican leadership in Congress has been complicit and compliant in this regard. After all, it is the majority party that has the power to call oversight hearings – or to *refuse* to call hearings. With the exception of hearings on the prisoner-abuse scandal, formal Congressional oversight of the administration’s practices and policies in Iraq has been woefully inadequate.

Certainly, one area that cries out for more aggressive oversight and questioning is defense contracting in Iraq. So I commend you, Senator Dorgan, for calling this series of hearings.

Senator, as a student of history, you know very well that past Democratic-controlled Congresses have provided very tough oversight of Democratic administrations in time of war. Then-Senator Harry Truman made his reputation by aggressively rooting out contracting abuses and war profiteering during World War II, during the FDR administration.

As Truman understood, Senators have a constitutional duty to provide oversight and scrutiny of the executive branch – even when their own party occupies the White House. This goes to the very heart of our system of checks and balances.

There is no doubt in my mind that, if this Republican-controlled Congress had fulfilled this duty more conscientiously, we could have avoided so many of the mistakes and abuses that we have witnessed in Iraq.

Some on the other side of the aisle – most recently at the Republican National Convention – have been quick to equate dissent, questioning, and criticism with disloyalty. They say it hurts morale and undermines the troops.

Dwight Eisenhower had a different view. He said: “Here in America, we are descended in blood and in spirit from revolutionists and rebels - men and women who dare to dissent from accepted doctrine. As their heirs, may we never confuse honest dissent with disloyal subversion.” President Eisenhower, Gen. Eisenhower, had it right. There is nothing unpatriotic about real oversight – not even in wartime.

And, Lord knows, oversight was called for during this war in Iraq. We have seen a failure to find weapons of mass destruction, a failure to adequately plan for the aftermath of the initial invasion, a failure to adequately equip and supply our troops, and – as we will discuss today – a failure to manage and monitor the defense contracting process.

Some \$8.8 billion of Iraqi money entrusted to the former Coalition Provisional Authority is unaccounted for. We have seen overcharging and price-gouging by contractors – old-

fashioned war profiteering. And, no question, these abuses have harmed our ability to win the peace and put Iraq back together again.

So today's hearing is appropriate – and it is urgent. I want to thank all of our witnesses for appearing, today, and for their vigilance on the matter of defense contracting in Iraq. I look forward to your testimony and the opportunity to ask you questions. Thank you, Senator Dorgan.