

Statement By Senator Richard Durbin
Democratic Policy Committee Hearing On Contracting Abuses In Iraq
November 3, 2003

Thank you very much, Senator Dorgan. Your meeting today couldn't be more timely. As we meet in this room, we are considering on the floor the \$87 billion supplemental appropriation.

I'm sure that there will be a festive atmosphere on K Street tonight after this is enacted by the Senate. We already have heard about lobbying firms that have been created and those that have advertised that they are the inside people to contact if you need to make certain that you get a piece of the action in Iraq. That is a sad commentary, because this was sold to the American people as an absolute necessity for the security and safety of the people of Iraq and for the security and safety of American troops. And I hope that, ultimately, that's what it turns out to be.

But it's not off to a very positive start. I asked Secretary Rumsfeld a couple weeks ago, at a hearing, whether he was in the room when someone suggested that they were going to give a multi-billion dollar contract to Halliburton, the firm that Vice President Cheney once worked with. And he said he recalled some conversations. I said, ``Did anybody in that room raise the question of an appearance of impropriety, that this firm, connected to the vice president, would be doing all of this work, frankly, under a contract which, though it might have been bid in its original form, ended up being a no-bid contract for actual services. And he said no.

Well, I think that tells us a lot about the sensitivities of this administration. I hope they change. But, unfortunately, we're not going to help them much with this bill.

I joined with Senator Pat Leahy and Senator Feinstein in putting a profiteering amendment in the Iraq supplemental appropriations bill . It was tough. It basically said if you're caught profiteering on the war in Iraq, you're going to face criminal penalties, and they'll be tough. Well, unfortunately, that provision was deleted in conference.

That's a sad commentary because I think the American people, as troubled as they are by this \$87 billion sticker shock, are troubled even more at the prospect that this is going to go to the friends of the administration or to some chummy arrangement or, frankly, be wasted in the deserts of Iraq when it might have been spent for the good of the people of that country.

So I'm anxious to hear this panel and their comments on what we can do to make certain that the money is well spent and that Congress lives up to its responsibility.

Thank you.