

Washington, D.C. - The House Appropriations Committee today approved a provision to require the Bush Administration to report on its failure to investigate and prosecute alleged abuses by private security contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan. The provision was included in the annual funding bill for the Justice Department.

Congressman David Price (D-NC), who sits on the subcommittee that drafted the bill, proposed the inclusion of the provision to enhance Congress's oversight of the use of private security contractors. He has long advocated for greater transparency and accountability for war contractors, and this move is the latest in a series of measures that Price has moved through the House of Representatives this year.

"We open our newspapers and see allegations on a regular basis of violent abuse by rogue contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan," said Price, "but the Justice Department has thus far barely lifted a finger to investigate or prosecute these crimes. The Administration has simply failed to enforce the laws on the books. With this language, the Administration will finally have to answer for its failure to act on this critical issue of law and order in war zones. I want to thank Chairman Alan Mollohan for recognizing the need for this provision and for including it in the bill he reported to the Committee."

The Justice Department has the authority to prosecute criminal misconduct by civilian contractors in a war zone under the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act (MEJA), which was enacted in 2000. The language approved by the Appropriations Committee highlights the fact that "the Department has not prosecuted any cases of civilian misconduct under MEJA, despite numerous allegations of criminal misconduct by civilian contractors." The legislation directs the Department to report to Congress on the number of incidents of alleged misconduct reported to the Department, the number of investigations undertaken, and the number of criminal cases opened and closed. The legislation further calls for an assessment of the Justice Department's capacity to prosecute contractor abuses under MEJA and whether additional resources or legal authority is needed in this regard.

Price cited the overall lack of accountability for private security contractors as the reason for this provision and others he has introduced. Earlier this year, the House passed the Defense Authorization bill that included language proposed by Price and Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), which would facilitate identifying and reporting cases of abuse by rogue contractors, and establish clear regulations, accountability mechanisms, and strong oversight for battlefield contracting. Price has also introduced two bills, H.R. 369 and H.R. 2740, to expand MEJA and

enhance law enforcement tools to investigate and prosecute abuses.

The Defense Authorization bill awaits Senate action, and the Judiciary Committee is considering Price's two bills. The Justice Department funding bill will now move to the House floor for consideration.

###