

**Washington, D.C.** - Today the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation to increase transparency and accountability in the government's use of armed contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The measure was attached to the Department of Defense Authorization bill. During floor debate, the House also approved an amendment offered by Reps. David Price (D-NC) and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) designed to further strengthen the bill's efforts to improve the government's ability to oversee contracting activities.

Price has been working for the last three years to clarify and enhance the rules governing the use of private contractors on the battlefield. There is currently scant information regarding the tens of thousands of armed contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Congress therefore has limited ability to exercise appropriate oversight of them. Unfortunately, the rules governing contractor behavior are clear to neither the contractor nor the government, which has led to a confusing legal scenario in which rogue contractors can act without fear of retribution. Despite many documented incidents of the alleged violent criminal misconduct by contractors, the Justice Department has filed charges in only one case of such abuse by a contractor in Iraq.

In response to Price's concerns, Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D-MO) included several provisions in his committee's bill based on legislation Price has authored which would facilitate identifying and reporting cases of abuse by rogue contractors, and establish clear regulations, accountability mechanisms, and strong oversight for battlefield contracting.

During House floor debate, Price joined Schakowsky in offering an amendment which would strengthen these provisions by requiring the government to issue guidance on uniforms and weapons for contractors, track information on contractor casualties, and give Congress access to a comprehensive database on contracting activities in Iraq and Afghanistan. The amendment would also require the Defense Department to explain its plans to implement a law passed in last year's Defense Authorization bill, which places civilian contractors under the legal authority of the military justice system. The Schakowsky-Price Amendment passed by a unanimous voice vote.

"This bill dramatically changes the rules of the game for battlefield contracting," Price said. "To this point, I think it's fair to say that there have been no rules in many cases, and that

contractors haven't been made aware of the rules that exist. With this legislation, the executive branch will be required to set out a clear framework for battlefield contracting, and Congress will be granted access to the information we need to hold the government accountable for enforcing this framework in a fair and just way."

Price plans to continue pressing for further reforms to ensure that allegations of abuse by armed contractors are fully investigated and prosecuted by the Justice and Defense Departments.

Below are Price's remarks on the amendment on the House floor.

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"I rise in support of the Schakowsky-Price amendment, and I thank my colleague, Mrs. Schakowsky, for yielding time and for her excellent work on this issue.

"I also want to thank [House Armed Services Committee] Chairman Skelton for the significant steps this bill takes in addressing the vast challenges surrounding battlefield contracting. He generously worked with me to include key elements of H.R. 369, my bill regarding security contractors, and I appreciate his leadership.

"Very quickly, I want to highlight three additional key improvements this amendment will make to the language in the bill:

"First, it will require the departments doing the vast majority of contracting – DoD, State, USAID – to track contractor casualties. We believe over 800 contractors have been killed in Iraq, and many more injured. But what is the exact toll? Right now, nobody knows. Our amendment will change that.

"Second, it will require these departments, when appropriate, to issue guidance on appropriate equipment and uniforms for contractors.

"And third, it will require the departments to clarify how a provision inserted in last year's defense authorization bill – which places certain contractors under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) – will be implemented. The DoD, which is responsible for the administration of UCMJ, has so far refrained from implementing or issuing guidance on this controversial provision.

"These are three simple but important additions that I think make the bill's current language even stronger, ensuring that the agencies engaged in contracting on the battlefield will develop an effective framework for managing and overseeing contractors.

"Four years into the war in Iraq, after all the stories of waste, abuse, and criminal misconduct, I think we can agree that this is not too much to ask. I urge my colleagues to support the amendment."

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