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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman June 23, 2004

We are here today to reaffirm our determination to fully investigate the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere. We're offering two pieces of legislation. One resolution would create a select committee of the House to conduct a bipartisan investigation of prisoner abuse in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay. The other seeks key documents from the Bush Administration so that the House can conduct effective oversight.

We previously wrote to President Bush to request many of the same documents. We asked that he provide them by June 17. That day came and went, but President Bush failed to respond to our request.

Meanwhile, the House of Representatives has failed to conduct a full and public investigation of the torture and humiliation of prisoners at Abu Ghraib or of the allegations of prisoner abuse at other locations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay. Our requests to committee chairs to hold bipartisan hearings and investigations have been rebuffed. No House committee is currently undertaking a formal public investigation into the prisoner abuse.

Time and time again the House majority has demonstrated that it has no interest in performing any serious oversight of this administration. The Republican majority has refused to investigate the alleged outing of CIA agent Valerie Plame by the White House. The majority has declined to investigate allegations that administration officials threatened to fire the Health and Human Services chief actuary if he disclosed unfavorable cost projections for the Medicare prescription drug benefit to Congress. Now the House majority wants to do as little oversight as possible when it comes to the abuse of detainees.

Congressional oversight is our constitutional duty. If the chairs of the relevant committees are unwilling to fulfill this obligation, then a select committee should be established to perform this function. If the Administration is unwilling to voluntarily produce key documents, then it should be directed to do so.

It is time for the congressional leadership to stop putting party loyalty before constitutional duty and to start conducting thorough and responsible oversight.