Mr. Speaker, the acts of abuse against Iraqi prisoners by

American service members are abhorrent and sad. This is not behavior

reflective of American values; it is not behavior that helps our cause,

and it is not behavior that will be tolerated. Thorough investigations

need to root out those responsible, directly and indirectly, for this

unlawful conduct no matter how high up the chain of command it goes.

Those responsible must be held accountable for their actions.

Congress needs to be highly involved in investigating the actions of

abuse at Abu Ghraib prison and the conditions and circumstances that

led to these abuses. Reports show that the military was well aware of

the situation and conducting its own investigations for months prior to

the release of the photos at Abu Ghraib now circulating through the

world media. The failure of the Administration to keep Congress

informed of the extent and seriousness of prisoner abuse, and the

photos documenting it, is unacceptable.

Further, Congress must address and investigate the role of private

security forces in Iraq. These forces, which constitute the second

largest army in Iraq and account for over 40 percent of all contracting

costs in Iraq, are outside the U.S. chain of command. The ability to

hold these individuals accountable for their actions under law is

questionable.

We must not lose focus, however, that the over 300,000 U.S. military

personnel who have served and are serving in Iraq are doing an

honorable job under difficult and dangerous conditions. While the

Department of Defense investigation into the actions and conduct of the

abuses at Abu Ghraib list a number of officers and enlisted personnel

who failed to perform their duties as required, it also notes a number

of officers and enlisted personnel who acted honorably and reported

abuses up the chain of command. When I visited Iraq in October, 2003, I

met with many honorable troops, including soldiers from western

Wisconsin, who were performing their mission with outstanding

commitment and professionalism. The abuses at Abu Ghraib serve only to

cloud the accomplishments and sacrifices of our troops and put

honorable U.S. service members in greater danger.

Mr. Speaker, perception matters when trying to execute our foreign

policy and especially a military mission. We are dangerously losing the

hearts and minds of the Iraqi people and the rest of the Arab world,

and the abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison serve only to exacerbate this

unfortunate reality. We must reinforce to the international community

through our words and our actions that the United States is committed

to helping the Iraqi people prosper in a free society.