Mr. President, the American people know about the strong

and honorable character of the American soldier. Over the last 228

years, the United States Army has rightly earned the reputation of a

professional fighting force that is courageous in battle and benevolent

in peace.

The United States Army has had centuries to earn the respect of the

American people. The White House expected our military to earn the

trust of the Iraqi people in only months. Despite the outstanding

service of countless thousands of our troops, the shameful and

disgusting abuse of Iraqi prisoners at the hands of U.S. soldiers is a

tragedy that must be corrected immediately.

The photographic evidence that Iraqi prisoners have been humiliated,

abused, and mistreated is absolutely shocking. One can hardly ponder

the technicalities of the Geneva Conventions when the most basic rules

of human decency have been violated. The disgust expressed by many

Americans has been amplified a thousand times by outraged Muslims

around the world.

How long might it be before Osama bin Laden uses these incidents to

whip up anti-American sentiment in other corners of the world? After

the bloodiest month of the occupation of Iraq, this is news our Nation

can ill afford.

It is not clear at this point who should be held to account for this

stain upon the reputation of our armed forces. No one has stepped

forward to take responsibility for the conditions in Iraqi prisons.

Instead, fingers are being pointed in every direction. Soldiers are

blaming superior officers, and generals are blaming subordinates.

Others blame our intelligence services, which blame contractors, who

blame others still. Some military leaders claim that this is an

isolated incident, others make ominous claims about patterns of abuses.

With whom does this buck stop?

The Armed Services Committee today had a closed-door briefing from

three Army Generals. No civilian official of the Department of Defense

appeared at the briefing, nor did any member of the Joint Chiefs of

Staff. I did not attend that briefing. Secret, closed door meetings on

a subject of such enormous import smack of damage control and cover-

up--and that is the last impression the Senate should be conveying. We

must ensure that Congress accedes to no ground rules in its

investigations that could further taint this deplorable situation.

The time for public hearings on prisons run by the U.S. Armed Forces

is now. We must leave no room for charges that investigations are being

glossed over, pushed aside, sat on, or ignored. I have written to the

chairman and ranking member of the Armed Services Committee to urge

them to call public hearings with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld,

Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet, and Chairman of the

Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers. The Armed Services

Committee should also seek testimony from outside experts on the laws

of war and humanitarian affairs, such as the International Committee

for the Red Cross, Human Rights Watch, and scholars of international

law.

These hearings should take place as soon as possible, and examine all

detention facilities run by the U.S. military, including those in Iraq,

Afghanistan, and elsewhere. The abuse of Iraqi prisoners was covered

for months until it was reported by the news media. Congress has no

time to spare to find out what went wrong and what is still wrong, and

take action to prevent further abuse of prisoners in our charge.