

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4502

May 4, 2004

The Honorable John Warner
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Carl Levin
Ranking Minority Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Warner and Senator Levin:

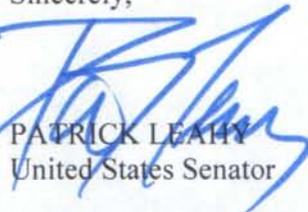
I know all of us were appalled this weekend at the reports of abuse of Iraqi prisoners. At a critical time, these reports gravely undercut the purpose and credibility of the American presence in Iraq. They threaten to hinder our nation's already weakened standing, especially in predominately Muslim countries, and undermine our ability to combat international terrorism around the world. They also risk emboldening those who capture or kidnap Americans around the world to accord our soldiers and civilians barbaric treatment.

I urge the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services to convene a series of hearings on this matter immediately. It is critical to understand how good military order broke down so fundamentally at Abu Ghraib. I would hope that any investigation would look at how the lack of good training, clear operating procedures, and a streamlined chain-of-command contributed to the situation. Additionally, the role of private military contractors in should also be carefully considered.

Most importantly, the country needs to know whether the abuses at Abu Ghraib are just symptomatic of a larger, systematic breakdown in protections within our national security apparatus against human rights abuses. Seymour Hersh indicates in his New Yorker article that these abhorrent acts might have been undertaken at the behest of Army intelligence and Central Intelligence Agency officials. The commander of the battalion that oversaw the prison subsequently told the press that she was basically forced to cede control over the cell block where the worst abuses occurred to these officials.

I understand that the Department of Defense is conducting a range of investigations into the alleged abuses. However, I believe that the consequences of this outrageous behavior go far enough that Congress must step in to ensure that such behavior does not happens again. I hope the Committee will soon examine this matter as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator