

May 24, 2004

As the world continues to be horrified by the Abu Ghraib prison photos that depict American soldiers committing unspeakable acts on Iraqi prisoners, the long-term global impact of these abuses is difficult to predict. However, it is certain that America's international reputation has suffered, as has the reputation of our armed forces-the overwhelming majority of whom have served with honor and dignity.

It is clear at this point that the Administration's planning for post-war Iraq was inadequate. I am concerned that this lack of planning and the resulting scarcity of resources may have set the stage for these deplorable events. Information has surfaced indicating that at certain points in time at Abu Ghraib, one battalion-normally equipped to handle less than 2,000 prisoners-was handling over 6,000. Moreover, it seems the poor attitude exhibited toward the involvement of the Red Cross in Iraq, attested to by reports of officials moving prisoners to avoid inspection by the Red Cross, also contributed to the severity of the situation. For more information, please visit <http://tomudall.house.gov/issues2.cfm?id=8773>.

In addition to calling on Secretary Rumsfeld to give a full accounting of the situation, I also have urged leaders in the House to conduct investigative hearings on these abuses, and intend to vigorously push for answers on why this situation occurred; why it was not stopped immediately; and why it was kept quiet for so long. The soldiers who committed these abuses are not the only ones to blame; ultimately those in the chain of command who did not end these abuses also must be held responsible. It is crucial that we show the world that America is fully committed to the fundamental values of democracy and freedom. It is of paramount importance that we follow through with those commitments. You also may visit <http://tomudall.house.gov/issues2.cfm?id=8699>.

You also may be interested to know that the week of May 10th was "Cover the Uninsured Week." The number of people lacking health insurance in America is one of the most critical health issues facing us today. It is estimated that 44 million Americans lack health insurance. In New Mexico, which has the second-worst coverage rate, one in five people are without coverage.

Thankfully at the state level, New Mexico officials recognize the critical situation and did an excellent job highlighting the "Cover the Uninsured Week" by hosting events throughout the state with local community leaders and healthcare workers. Amazingly,

here in the U.S. House of Representatives, the best the leadership could do is revisit familiar, inadequate legislation that does little, if anything, to address this crisis.

Two of the bills the House passed last week were already passed last year--H.R. 4280 (identical to H.R. 5), and H.R. 4281 (identical to H.R. 660). Both bills seek to address important issues, but do so in a misguided way. To learn more about this, click: <http://democraticwhip.house.gov/media/floor.cfm?pressReleaseID=615>.

H.R. 4281 - and its earlier twin, H.R. 660 - allows small business employers to pool together under what are called "Association Health Plans." Although I voted against both H.R. 4281 and H.R. 660, I supported a substitute measure both times that establishes a small employer health benefit plan similar to the Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan, which would contract with state-licensed health insurers to offer a minimum insurance package for all employees of businesses of fewer than 100 people. Unlike H.R. 4281 and H.R. 660, the substitute I supported provides that these small employer plans remain subject to state health insurance regulations.