

Braley Introduces Bill to Help Tortured American Veterans Pursue Justice

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Washington, DC -- Rep. Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) today introduced a bill that aimed to correct a flawed Defense Department Authorization Act (HR 4986) by introducing a bill to restore a provision allowing American veterans and victims of torture to pursue legal claims against their torturers.

In December, President Bush vetoed the original version of the Defense Authorization Act over a provision that allowed American POWs tortured in Iraq to pursue legal action against the Iraqi government in US courts.

Despite bipartisan support for the provision, Congress agreed to strip the language from the bill to ensure its passage into law, granting Iraq immunity from such claims. This revised Defense Act was signed into law by the President yesterday.

Braley's bill, the Justice for Victims of Torture and Terrorism Act, would effectively restore the provision and allow American torture victims to pursue legal action against state sponsors of terrorism.

"American veterans tortured as prisoners of war don't deserve to be left behind by a Presidential policy that keeps them from seeking justice," Braley said. "We need to hold countries accountable for torturing American troops so it never happens again. And we need to get our priorities straight. Protecting American veterans and POWs should come before protecting Saddam Hussein's assets.

"Congress needs to act quickly to correct the flawed Defense Authorization Act by passing this bill. I'm confident that there is strong bipartisan support in the House to right this wrong and send a message to the President that American soldiers deserve the right to bring torturers to justice."

In 2002, 17 American ex-prisoners of war who were brutally tortured in Iraq during the first Persian Gulf War sued Saddam Hussein's regime. The veterans eventually won a judgment against Hussein.

But shortly after the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration stepped in and had the judgment overturned.

In December, President Bush vetoed the Defense Authorization Act because it contained a provision that would have allowed these soldiers to continue their case against the Hussein regime.

Last week, Rep. Braley spoke at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, to discuss the President's veto and his legislation.

The bill has 28 original co-sponsors, including House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers (D-Michigan), Financial Services Committee Chairman Barney Frank (D-Mass.), and Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller (D-Calif.).

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