

January 22, 2009 - Murtha Praises Executive Orders on Closing Guantanamo and Ending Torture

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Congressman John P. Murtha, Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, praised today's decision by President Obama to sign Executive Orders closing the U.S. military detention facility at Guantanamo Bay and prohibiting the use of torture by U.S. personnel. The following comments appear at www.huffingtonpost.com:

President Obama took the first key step in restoring America's image and credibility in the world by issuing an Executive Order to close the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay and to prohibit the use of torture by U.S. personnel.

I applaud his judgment and I wholeheartedly support this decision.

The Bush Administration never understood what the Guantanamo detention facility symbolized to the rest of the world. They saw it as simply a prison, and just weeks ago, Dick Cheney commented that he thought "Guantanamo has been very well run." The problem with Guantanamo was never about its bricks and mortar. The problem with Guantanamo is that its very existence stains and defies the moral fiber of our great nation.

The Bush Administration created the prison following the attacks of September 11th as a way to circumvent the rule-of-law, to legitimize the use of torture, and to justify the permanent detention of those denied the right to petition their imprisonment.

Guantanamo has cast a dark shadow over two centuries of America's moral leadership in the world.

I said over two years ago that in order to restore our international credibility, we must shut down the Guantanamo detention facility. Even President Bush and Secretary Gates agreed. But Guantanamo remained open because the Bush Administration refused to provide a legitimate plan and a legal means to charge and try its detainees, and to relocate them to their respective home countries or to maximum security prisons in the United States.

Similarly, there is no circumstance, whatsoever, that justifies the use of torture. Congress passed

legislation in December 2005 that banned the use of torture and limited the interrogation tactics of U.S. military personnel. The Subcommittee that I chair has also included provisions in military spending bills forcing the Defense Department to adhere to the strict interrogation guidelines set forth in the Army Field Manual. While these are the requirements for U.S. military personnel, the Bush Administration refused to hold our intelligence community to the same standards.

No longer must we wait for a U.S. President to act.

President Obama has taken the first step in correcting the mistakes of our past. He has made the right choice, and today's decision renews hope in American values and leadership around the world.

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