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Separate Fact, Fiction

EDITORIAL
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A BIPARTISAN GROUP of Congress members returned from a long-overdue inspection trip to the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, over the weekend, and they report that detainees there are being treated humanely. That is good news, indeed.

Democrats and Republicans alike report that they found conditions in the military detention facility there acceptable. In fact, some senators said that the conditions were much better than they had expected.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, said "I feel very good," after his visit. Sen. Jim Bunning, R-Ky., said he was surprised to learn that "the detainees had air conditioning and semiprivate showers."

Rep. Ellen Tauscher, D-Alamo, who went on the one-day inspection tour, said she was satisfied with what she saw. She said she found a humane facility that is very comparable to a U.S. maximum-security detention facility.

Tauscher said that each of the 518 detainees in the facility have been through an administrative review board. About 200 other detainees were released during this process. The remaining prisoners all have been informed of their right to legal counsel, and Tauscher said, between 125 and 150 have chosen to be represented. All of the detainees are now subject to military tribunals, which must be conducted. Tauscher believes those tribunals must begin soon. We could not agree with her more on that point.

If America is to stand for the rule of law throughout the world, it must conduct those tribunals, and they must begin soon.

The congressional inspection of the prison at Guantanamo is an important step in separating fact from fiction about how the U.S. government is prosecuting the war on terror. It is something that should have happened long ago. But we also must not forget that it is only a first step.

There is more to Guantanamo than the physical facilities. Charges also have been leveled against the interrogation techniques being used there.

Notwithstanding the recent -- and now retracted -- ignorant comments of Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., comparing abuses at the prison to Soviet gulags and Nazi concentration camps, those charges must be fully explored.

We urge President Bush to appoint a bipartisan committee to investigate the charges regarding interrogation methods. The committee could ask for testimony from the FBI, which has been investigating the complaints for some time now.

We must show the world that we really do believe in the rule of law in this nation.