

DICK VERSUS SCOTTISH HAGGIS: THE GRUDGE MATCH

Arlen "Scottish Haggis" Specter took the opportunity yesterday to enter a letter exchange he had with Dick Cheney into the Congressional Record. Here's that exchange (see below the letters for my analysis; h/t for Selise to alerting me the transcripts were up):

U.S. SENATE,

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,

Washington, DC, June 7, 2006.

Hon. Richard B. Cheney,
The Vice President,
Washington, DC.

Dear Mr. Vice President: I am taking this unusual step in writing to you to establish a public record. It is neither pleasant nor easy to raise these issues with the Administration of my own party, but I do so because of their importance,

No one has been more supportive of a strong national defense and tough action against terrorism than I. However, the Administration's continuing position on the NSA electronic surveillance program rejects the historical constitutional practice of judicial approval of warrants before wiretapping and denigrates the constitutional authority and responsibility of the Congress and specifically the Judiciary Committee to conduct oversight on constitutional issues.

On March 16, 2006, I introduced legislation to authorize the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to rule on the constitutionality of the Administration's electronic surveillance

program. Expert witnesses, including four former judges of the FISA Court, supported the legislation as an effective way to preserve the secrecy of the program and protect civil rights. The FISA Court has an unblemished record for keeping secrets and it has the obvious expertise to rule on the issue. The FISA Court judges and other experts concluded that the legislation satisfied the case-in-controversy requirement and was not a prohibited advisory opinion. Notwithstanding my repeated efforts to get the Administration's position on this legislation, I have been unable to get any response, including a "no".

The Administration's obligation to provide sufficient information to the Judiciary Committee to allow the Committee to perform its constitutional oversight is not satisfied by the briefings to the Congressional Intelligence Committees. On that subject, it should be noted that **this Administration, as well as previous Administrations, has failed to comply with the requirements of the National Security Act of 1947 to keep the House and Senate Intelligence Committees fully informed.** That statute has been ignored for decades when Presidents have only informed the so-called "Gang of Eight," the Leaders of both Houses and the Chairmen and Ranking on the Intelligence Committees. From my experience as a member of the "Gang of Eight" when I chaired the Intelligence Committee of the 104th Congress, even that group gets very little information. It was only in the face of pressure from the Senate Judiciary Committee that the Administration reluctantly informed subcommittees of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees and then agreed to inform the full Intelligence Committee members in order to get

General Hayden confirmed.

When there were public disclosures about the telephone companies turning over millions of customer records involving allegedly billions of telephone calls, the Judiciary Committee scheduled a hearing of the chief executive officers of the four telephone companies involved. When some of the companies requested subpoenas so they would not be volunteers, we responded that we would honor that request. Later, the companies indicated that if the hearing were closed to the public, they would not need subpoenas.

I then sought Committee approval, which is necessary under our rules, to have a closed session to protect the confidentiality of any classified information and scheduled a Judiciary Committee Executive Session for 2:30 P.M. yesterday to get that approval.

I was advised yesterday that you had called Republican members of the Judiciary Committee lobbying them to oppose any Judiciary Committee hearing, even a closed one, with the telephone companies. I was further advised that you told those Republican members that the telephone companies had been instructed not to provide any information to the Committee as they were prohibited from disclosing classified information.

I was surprised, to say the least, that you sought to influence, really determine, the action of the Committee without calling me first, or at least calling me at some point. This was especially perplexing since we both attended the Republican Senators caucus lunch yesterday and I walked directly in front of you on at least two occasions

enroute from the buffet to my table.

At the request of Republican Committee members, I scheduled a Republican members meeting at 2:00 P.M. yesterday in advance of the 2:30 P.M. full Committee meeting. At that time, I announced my plan to proceed with the hearing and to invite the chief executive officers of the telephone companies who would not be subject to the embarrassment of being subpoenaed because that was no longer needed. I emphasized my preference to have a closed hearing providing a majority of the Committee agreed.

Senator Hatch then urged me to defer action on the telephone companies hearing, saying that he would get Administration support for my bill which he had long supported. In the context of the doubt as to whether there were the votes necessary for a closed hearing or to proceed in any manner as to the telephone companies, I agreed to Senator Hatch's proposal for a brief delay on the telephone companies hearing to give him an opportunity to secure the Administration's approval of the bill which he thought could be done. When I announced this course of action at the full Committee Executive Session, there was a very contentious discussion which is available on the public record.

It has been my hope that there could be an accommodation between Congress's Article I authority on oversight and the President's constitutional authority under Article II. **There is no doubt that the NSA program violates the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act which sets forth the exclusive procedure for domestic wiretaps which requires the approval of the FISA Court.** It may be that the President has inherent

authority under Article II to trump that statute but the President does not have a blank check and the determination on whether the President has such Article II power calls for a balancing test which requires knowing what the surveillance program constitutes.

If an accommodation cannot be reached with the Administration, the Judiciary Committee will consider confronting the issue with subpoenas and enforcement of that compulsory process if it appears that a majority vote will be forthcoming. The Committee would obviously have a much easier time making our case for enforcement of subpoenas against the telephone companies which do not have the plea of executive privilege. That may ultimately be the course of least resistance.

We press this issue in the context of repeated stances by the Administration on expansion of Article II power, frequently at the expense of Congress's Article I authority. There are the Presidential signing statements where the President seeks to cherry-pick which parts of the statute he will follow. There has been the refusal of the Department of Justice to provide the necessary clearances to permit its Office of Professional Responsibility to determine the propriety of the legal advice given by the Department of Justice on the electronic surveillance program. There is the recent Executive Branch search and seizure of Congressman Jefferson's office. There are recent and repeated assertions by the Department of Justice that it has the authority to criminally prosecute newspapers and reporters under highly questionable criminal statutes.

All of this is occurring in the context

where the Administration is continuing warrantless wiretaps in violation of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and is preventing the Senate Judiciary Committee from carrying out its constitutional responsibility for Congressional oversight on constitutional issues. I am available to try to work this out with the Administration without the necessity of a constitutional confrontation between Congress and the President.

Sincerely,
Arlen Specter.

Here's Dick's response:

THE VICE PRESIDENT,

Washington, June 8, 2006.

Hon. Arlen Specter,
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary,
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

Dear Mr. Chairman: This is in response to your letter of June 7, 2006 concerning the Terrorist Surveillance Program (TSP) the Administration has described. The commitment in your letter to work with the Administration in a non-confrontational manner is most welcome and will, of course, be reciprocated.

As recently as Tuesday of this week, I reiterated that, as the Administration has said before, while there is no need for any legislation to carry out the Terrorist Surveillance Program, the Administration will listen to the ideas of legislators about terrorist surveillance legislation and work with them in good faith. Needless to say, that includes you, Senator DeWine and others who have ideas for such legislation. The President ultimately will have to make a decision whether any

particular legislation would strengthen the ability of the Government to protect Americans against terrorists, while protecting the rights of Americans, but we believe the Congress and the Administration working together can produce legislation to achieve that objective, if that is the will of the Congress.

Having served in the executive branch as chief of staff for one President and as Secretary of Defense for another, having served in the legislative branch as a Representative from Wyoming for a decade, and **serving now in a unique position under the Constitution with both executive functions and legislative functions, I fully understand and respect the separate constitutional roles of the Congress and the Presidency.** Under our constitutional separation between the legislative powers granted to Congress and the executive power vested exclusively in the Presidency, differences of view may occur from time to time between the branches, but the Government generally functions best when the legislative branch and the executive branch work together. And I believe that both branches agree that they should work together as Congress decides whether and how to pursue further terrorist surveillance legislation

Your letter addressed four basic subjects: (1) the legal basis for the TSP; (2) the Administration position on legislation prepared by you relating to the TSP; (3) provision of information to Congress about the TSP; and (4) communications with Senators on the Judiciary Committee about the TSP.

The executive branch has conducted the TSP, from its inception on October 4,

2001 to the present, with great care to operate within the law, **with approval as to legality of Presidential authorizations every 45 days or so by senior Government attorneys.** The Department of Justice has set forth in detail in writing the constitutional and statutory bases, and related judicial precedents, for warrantless electronic surveillance under the TSP to protect against terrorism, and that information has been made available to your Committee and to the public.

Your letter indicated that you have repeatedly requested an Administration position on legislation prepared by you relating to the TSP program. If you would like a formal Administration position on draft legislation, you may at any time submit it to the Attorney General, the Director of National Intelligence, or the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for processing, which will produce a formal Administration position. Before you do so, however, it might be more productive for executive branch experts to meet with you, and perhaps Senator DEWINE or other Senators as appropriate, to review the various bills that have been introduced and to share the Administration's thoughts on terrorist surveillance legislation. Attorney General Alberto

R. Gonzales and Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Legal Counsel Steven G. Bradbury are key experts upon whom the executive branch would rely for this purpose. I will ask them to contact you promptly so that the cooperative effort can proceed apace.

Since the earliest days of the TSP, the executive branch has ensured that, consistent with the protection of the

sensitive intelligence sources, methods and activities involved, appropriate members of Congress were briefed periodically on the program. The executive branch kept principally the chairman and ranking members of the congressional intelligence committees informed and later included the congressional leadership. Today, the full membership of both the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (including four Senators on that Committee who also serve on your Judiciary Committee) are fully briefed on the program. **As a matter of inter-branch comity and good executive-legislative practice, and recognizing the vital importance of protecting U.S. intelligence sources, methods and activities, we believe that the country as a whole, and the Senate and the House respectively, are best served by concentrating the congressional handling of intelligence matters within the intelligence committees of the Congress.** The internal organization of the two Houses is, of course, a matter for the respective Houses. Recognizing the wisdom of the concentration within the intelligence committees, the rules of the Senate (S. Res. 400 of the 94th Congress) and the House (Rule X, cl. 11) creating the intelligence committees mandated that the intelligence committees have cross-over members who also serve on the judiciary, foreign/international relations, armed services, and appropriations committees.

Both in performing the legislative functions of the Vice Presidency as President of the Senate and in performing executive functions in support of the President, I have frequent contact with Senators, both at

their initiative and mine. We have found such contacts helpful in maintaining good relations between the executive and legislative branches and in advancing legislation that serves the interests of the American people. The respectful and candid exchange of views is something to be encouraged rather than avoided.

Indeed, recognizing the importance of such communication, the first step the Administration took, when it learned that you might pursue use of compulsory process in an attempt to force testimony that may involve extremely sensitive classified information, was to have one of the Administration's most senior officials, the Chief of Staff to the President of the United States, contact you to discuss the matter. Thereafter, I spoke with a number of other Members of the Senate Leadership and the Judiciary Committee. These communications are not unusual—they are the Government at work.

While there may continue to be areas of disagreement from time to time, we should proceed in a practical way to build on the areas of agreement. I believe that other Senators and you, working with the executive branch, can find the way forward to enactment of legislation that would strengthen the ability of the Government to protect Americans against terrorists, while continuing to protect the rights of Americans, if it is the judgment of Congress that such legislation should be enacted. We look forward to working with you, knowing of the good faith on all sides.

Sincerely,
DICK CHENEY.

And here are my comments:

First, have I mentioned that Dick Cheney is an

asshole? Oh, you already knew that?

Scottish Haggis accuses Dick of several things:

- Blowing him off at a luncheon and then going behind his back to conspire with (presumably) Orrin Hatch and others
- Refusing to fulfill the law mandating that the Administration inform Congress of its activities
- Violating FISA with the Administration's warrantless wiretap program

And Cheney's response is a breathtaking "go fuck yourself."

- He pretty much says, "yeah, I'm lobbying other Republicans behind your back—what are you going to do about it?"
- He ignores the laws regarding informing Congress and says simply that "inter-brach comity" requires that only the Intelligence Committees get to exercise any oversight.
- He states simply that the Administration doesn't need any legislative sanction for his warrantless wiretap program (it's as if Obi Ben Kenobe said, "these aren't the legislative droids

you're looking for," and Haggis was appropriately swayed).

- And oh, by the way, if Haggis doesn't like Dick's interpretation of the Constitution, then tough, because Dick is the Fourth Branch and that gives him superior wisdom.

Like I said. Dick's an asshole.

Two more details I highlighted that appear important, given the current debate on whether or not the telecoms had adequate reason to believe the warrantless wiretap program is legal.

- The telecom companies would have happily come and testified to Congress, but Dick wouldn't let them.
- Dick says that the warrantless wiretap program was run "with approval as to legality of Presidential authorizations every 45 days or so **by senior Government attorneys.**"

If find that last bit particularly curious, since it suggests that there's more than one authorization signed not by the AG, but by "senior Government attorneys," which could mean Alberto Gonzales as White House Counsel, or could mean John Yoo as Dick's personal Unitary Executive Handmaiden.

Oh. And have I mentioned that Dick is an asshole?