

ODE TO DONNA EDWARDS' WHEATIES

I don't actually know that this sudden outbreak of spine and seemingly coordinated messaging among Democrats is the result of seeing Donna Edwards kick a Democratic incumbent's behind, but she's a great person and might as well get the credit. Here's Silvestre Reyes:

Because I care so deeply about protecting our country, I take strong offense to your suggestion in recent days that the country will be vulnerable to terrorist attack unless Congress immediately enacts legislation giving you broader powers to conduct warrantless surveillance of Americans' communications and provides legal immunity for telecommunications companies that participated in the Administration's warrantless surveillance program.

[snip]

If our nation is left vulnerable in the coming months, it will not be because we don't have enough domestic spying powers. It will be because your Administration has not done enough to defeat terrorist organizations—including al Qaeda— that have gained strength since 9/11. We do not have nearly enough linguists to translate the reams of information we currently collect. We do not have enough intelligence officers who can penetrate the hardest targets, such as al Qaeda. We have surged so many intelligence resources into Iraq that we have taken our eye off the ball in Afghanistan and Pakistan. As a result, you have allowed al Qaeda to reconstitute itself on your watch.

You have also suggested that Congress must grant retroactive immunity to telecommunications companies. As someone who has been briefed on our most sensitive intelligence programs, I can see no argument why the future security of our country depends on whether past actions of telecommunications companies are immunized.

The issue of telecom liability should be carefully considered based on a full review of the documents that your Administration withheld from Congress for eight months. However, it is an insult to the intelligence of the American people to say that we will be vulnerable unless we grant immunity for actions that happened years ago.

[snip]

I urge you, Mr. President, to put partisanship aside and allow Republicans in Congress to arrive at a compromise that will protect America and protect our Constitution.

I, for one, do not intend to back down – not to the terrorists and not to anyone, including a President, who wants Americans to cower in fear.

We are a strong nation. We cannot allow ourselves to be scared into suspending the Constitution. If we do that, we might as well call the terrorists and tell them that they have won. [my emphasis]

And here's Harry Reid:

I regret your reckless attempt to manufacture a crisis over the reauthorization of foreign surveillance laws. Instead of needlessly frightening the country, you should work with Congress in a calm, constructive way to

provide our intelligence professionals with all needed tools while respecting the privacy of law-abiding Americans.

Both the House and the Senate have passed bills to reauthorize and improve the Protect America Act. Democrats stand ready to negotiate with Republicans to resolve the differences between the House and Senate bills. That is how the legislative process works. Your unrealistic demand that the House simply acquiesce in the Senate version is preventing that negotiation from moving forward.

Our bicameral system of government was designed to ensure broad bipartisan consensus for important laws. A FISA bill negotiated between the House and the Senate would have firmer support in Congress and among the American people, which would serve the intelligence community's interest in creating stronger legal certainty for surveillance activities.

That negotiation should take place immediately. In the meantime, we should extend the current Protect America Act. Earlier this week you threatened to veto an extension, and at your behest Senate Republicans have blocked such a bill. Yesterday every House Republican voted against an extension.

Your opposition to an extension is inexplicable. Just last week, Director of National Intelligence McConnell and Attorney General Mukasey wrote to Congress that "it is critical that the authorities contained in the Protect America Act not be allowed to expire." Similarly, House Minority Leader Boehner has said "allowing the Protect America Act to expire would undermine our national security and endanger American lives, and that is unacceptable." And

you yourself said at the White House today: "There is really no excuse for letting this critical legislation expire." I agree.

Nonetheless, you have chosen to let the Protect America Act expire. **You bear responsibility for any intelligence collection gap that may result.**

Fortunately, your decision to allow the Protect America Act to expire does not, in reality, threaten the safety of Americans. As you are well aware, existing surveillance orders under that law remain in effect for an additional year, and the 1978 FISA law itself remains available for new surveillance orders. Your suggestion that the law's expiration would prevent intelligence agents from listening to the conversations of terrorists is utterly false.

Imagine that? A leader from both the House and Senate repeating roughly the same message—Bush should stop fear-mongering and do what it takes to really protect the country. Democrats reasonably successfully countering a predictable Bush attack!

Before you know it, we'll be adequately represented on the Sunday shows, and we'll actually discover that if we simply try to win the messaging battle, it might well help us win some political battles.

It must be the Wheaties...