

REPUBLICANS APPROPRIATING TORTURE

As I reported some weeks ago, Nancy Pelosi suggested one way the Bush Administration worked around the intelligence committees on torture and wiretapping was via the Appropriations Committees.

Q: Does this call into question the value of the briefing then, if they are not telling you fully...

Speaker Pelosi. I have questioned the values of the briefings over and over and over again. We only know what they choose to tell us and the manner and time in which they tell us. And that is why when people are talking about – whether they are talking about torture, or whether they are talking about wiretapping, or whatever you are talking about, we really have to have a change now in how Congress can do its oversight, because we expect and demand the truth.

And that's why I, when I became Speaker, established this joint committee between the Appropriations Committee and the Intelligence Committee, because the fact is they really were not fully briefing the Intelligence Committee. And they have to answer to the Appropriations Committee because that's where their funding comes from.

It is a long story, it's an evolution. It used to be the Intelligence Committee – you couldn't appropriate unless the Intelligence Committee authorized. It was almost effectively an appropriation. Over time the Intelligence in the Bush years became part of supplementals so there was absolutely no sharing of

information. They would just stick the request in the supplementals. We said, "Okay, if they are going right to appropriations, we will have members of the Intelligence Committee serve in this hybrid committee, part Intelligence, part Appropriations." [my emphasis]

Now, the Appropriations briefing for torture actually came much later than it did for wiretapping (three years after the start of the program, rather than immediately after). But look at what CIA's amazingly self-serving list of briefings describes having happened:

October 18, 2005: Interrogation techniques briefed. Ted Stevens, Thad Cochran

September 19, 2006: Briefing on full detainee program, including the 13 EITs. Bill Young, John Murtha (John Murtha did not stay for EIT portion of briefing)

October 11, 2007: The Director discussed the number of detainees subjected to EITs and discussed EITs. John Murtha

First, note the timing of these. The first Appropriations briefing took place during the debate on the Detainee Treatment Act, at a time when there were a significant number of Republican-only briefings: two for Fristie, one for McCain, one for Duncan Hunter, one for Crazy Pete Hoekstra, and the briefing for "Appropriations."

But they on briefed the Republicans in charge of Defense Appropriations—not the Democrats.

More interesting, though, is the specific timing. The briefing took place about two weeks after the Senate voted in overwhelming numbers to support the McCain Amendment: a 90-9 vote, purportedly ending torture at least with the military. Two of the nine people to vote the pro-torture stance? Toobz Stevens and Thad

Cochran, who just two weeks later got a briefing on torture techniques.

Nancy Pelosi says the Bush Administration was sneaking stuff through on appropriations lines. And just two weeks after the Senate voted overwhelmingly to prohibit torture, two of the pro-torture Republicans—the two that happened to control the military's purse strings—got their very own briefing on torture.

Then there's a briefing of the House Armed Services Appropriations Leaders in September 2006—after Bush has purportedly brought all the high value detainees to Gitmo and ended torture. Yet they're still briefing all the torture techniques. Only, somehow, John Murtha doesn't happen to stick around long enough to hear about the torture techniques. It's not until a full year later that Murtha gets a briefing on the torture techniques (interestingly enough, directly from Michael Hayden).

Now, the timing of both of these briefings is suspicious. At a time when Congress is trying to reel in torture, the defense appropriators get briefed on techniques that have purportedly been halted. But even more suspicious is the way that just Republicans got briefed on these techniques.

It sure does raise questions about what Cheney was sneaking through in his appropriations, huh?