

DAVID IGNATIUS CONFUSES JOE MCCARTHY AND DAN BURTON

David Ignatius got it wrong, IMO, when he asked whether Darrell Issa is going to be the next Joe McCarthy.

When you see the righteous gleam in Issa's eye, recall other zealous congressional investigators who claimed to be doing the public's business but ended up pursuing vendettas. I think of Robert F. Kennedy's ruthless pursuit of labor "racketeering" when he was chief counsel of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. And, more chilling, I think of Sen. Joseph McCarthy's use of that subcommittee to probe what he imagined was Communist Party subversion in America.

[snip]

Issa doesn't come across as a McCarthyite. Indeed, he has struck me as one of the smarter and more creative members of the Republican caucus. But he now has the whip in his hand, and investigative power, as we have so many times in American history, can be grotesquely abused.

Ignatius' analogy shows his blindness in two directions.

First, it's pretty obvious that Peter King, not Darrell Issa, intends to be the next McCarthy. Sure, other Republicans will join him in his anti-Muslim fear-mongering, but King is the guy who has promised to use his gavel to accomplish that task. Peter King's goal, it seems, like that of Joe McCarthy, is to foster a generalized

atmosphere of fear and distrust to justify authoritarian measures.

And given that today's equivalent of anti-Communist witch hunts is anti-Muslim and anti-Arab attacks, it'd be particularly dangerous for Lebanese-American Darrell Issa to carry out that task. Indeed, Debbie Schlussel, one of the key operatives in sowing anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hate, has in the past targeted Issa for his ancestry, calling him "Jihad Darrell."

But all that's not to say Issa won't launch into a bunch of wasteful witch hunts. But they're obviously modeled on the witch hunts of Dan Burton, Issa's predecessor at Oversight, in which a slew of baseless investigations served the purpose of delegitimizing the President.

Perhaps I'm being a pedant for insisting on this distinction, but I do so for two reasons. First, because it's important to understand the structure of these witch hunts and the intended targets of them. Issa, it seems to me, has an entirely political aim, whereas King's is more societal. Issa's target is Obama, King's is all of us.

But I also think it remarkable that a purportedly centrist Villager like Ignatius can't even summon the more obvious Burton comparison. All the blathering about bipartisanship, after all, ignores the tactics Republicans use to discredit their opponents, tactics that Burton mastered. It ignores the way Republicans put aside the good of the country to score political points.

I'm glad that Ignatius is calling on Issa to act like an adult, but he seems to ignore the whole point of Issa's forecast witch hunts.