

JIM SENSENBRENNER FLIP-FLOPS WILDLY ON VALUE OF CLASSIFIED HEARINGS

Jenna McLaughlin has a report on what I noted here – House Judiciary Committee Chair Bob Goodlatte has scheduled a classified hearing to talk about Section 702 of the FISA Amendments Act on February 2. In it, she includes this unbelievable quote from Jim Sensenbrenner.

“Closed briefings are necessary for members of Congress to ask questions about classified information,” said Judiciary Committee member Jim Sensenbrenner, R-Wisc., in a statement to *The Intercept*. “However, I would support a subsequent open hearing on Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act because transparency and public discussion are critical to the reform and reauthorization of Section 702.”

It’s unbelievable because, after Sensenbrenner made some horseshit claims of ignorance immediately after Edward Snowden revealed the phone dragnet that had been authorized by legislation Sensenbrenner had authored, people started asking why he hadn’t gone to the classified hearings, at which DOJ briefed members about the dragnet (and FBI later lied about the abuses carried out in executing that dragnet).

Sensenbrenner’s spokesperson explained back in 2013 that he didn’t go to those classified hearing because he didn’t want to be restrained by confidentiality.

Asked whether his boss had attended any of those sessions during that period, Sensenbrenner spokesperson Ben Miller

said the congressman “does not want to be limited by the restraints of confidentiality. Therefore, he believes in an open dialogue by which legislative solutions can be constructed and passed into law before the public.” Miller said Sensenbrenner had “attended confidential briefings in the past,” but didn’t say how many, which ones, or whether any dealt directly with the “sensitive” application of section 215.

[snip]

“While some members of Congress were briefed, particularly those on the intelligence committees, most, including myself, were not,” Sensenbrenner wrote in a column for *The Guardian* newspaper. Sensenbrenner did not disclose, as his spokesperson did for this story, that he chooses not to attend the briefings.

So back in 2013, when Sensenbrenner was disclaiming any responsibility for a dragnet, he didn’t to be restrained by what he gets told in a classified hearing.

But now, at a time when Congress might consider stopping FBI from doing its uncounted back door searches of people it has no evidence against, Sensenbrenner says “closed briefings are necessary.”

Given what 2013 Sensenbrenner said about the importance of conducting these discussions in the light of day, and given that Section 702 has always been debated in public, I would suggest Sensenbrenner’s support for closed hearings now suggests the fix is in.

One wonders what squeals of outrage Sensenbrenner will make in 2023 after new abuses of Section 702 get disclosed?