US-BASED DRONES FOR THE SAKE OF DRONES



(graphic: darkblack for Firedoglake)

Apparently, a bunch of people claiming to be interested in jobs inserted an amendment into the FAA bill requiring the FAA to allow for drones in US airspace. (h/t NC)

> I became aware of the pro-drone legislation from a February 10, 2011, Syracuse Post Standard report that Sen. Charles Schumer (D-New York) was supporting an amendment to the pending Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization bill (S. 223) that would create test zones for the introduction of drones into general airspace.
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> Senator Schumer was interested in the pro-drone amendment because MQ-9 Reaper drones, killer drones that are flying over Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, are stationed at Hancock Air Base near Syracuse. However, FAA safety restrictions have limited drone flights out of Hancock.
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> "If Schumer's legislative move succeeds this week," said the Post Standard, "it would help ensure the future of 1,215 jobs at the (air) base in Mattydale (New York) and potentially lead to millions of dollars in radar research contracts for local defense companies."

Aside from jobs, what's remarkable about the push for drones is how amorphous the purpose of the drones are. Here's Candice Miller, one of

the sponsors of the amendment, describing the need:

> My amendment is designed to help expedite and to improve the process by which FAA works with government agencies to incorporate unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs as they're commonly called, into the National Airspace System. Currently, Mr. Chairman, law enforcement agencies across the country, from **Customs and Border Protection to local police departments, et cetera**, are ready to embrace the new technology and to start utilizing UAVs in the pursuit of enforcing the law and protecting our border as well.
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> However, the FAA has been very hesitant to give authorization to these UAVs due to limited air space and restrictions that they have. I certainly can appreciate those concerns; but when we're talking about Customs and Border Protection **or the FBI**, what have you, we are talking about missions of national security. And certainly there's nothing more important than that. It was a very, very lengthy exercise to get the FAA to authorize the use of UAVs on the southern border. While they're finally being utilized down there, we are certainly a long way from fully utilizing these technologies. [my emphasis]

That is, we're talking about CPB (which has used the drones for some years), but also the FBI, local police departments, and "et cetera" using the drones.

Did I miss the open, public debate about whether we want the FBI—much less local police departments or "et cetera" using drones to spy on Americans' activities?

Then again, I guess this is why the government

needs to trump up claims about self-radicalized Americans: to provide some justification, no matter how thing, for our latest jobs program.