

RICHARD BURR PREPARES TO CAPITALIZE ON REFUSING TO EXERCISE INTELLIGENCE OVERSIGHT

In James Risen's new book, he provides new details on what happened to the NSA whistleblowers – Bill Binney, Kurt Wiebe, Ed Loomis, Thomas Drake – who tried to stop President Bush's illegal wiretap program, adding to what Jane Mayer wrote in 2011. He pays particular attention to the effort Diane Roark made, as a staffer overseeing NSA on the House Intelligence Committee, to alert people that the Agency was conducting illegal spying on Americans.

As part of that, Risen describes an effort Roark made to inform another Congressman of the program, one who had not been briefed: Richard Burr.

Despite the warning from (HPSCI's Republican Staff Director Tim) Sample not to talk with anyone else on the committee about the program, she privately warned Chris Barton, the committee's new general counsel, that "there was an NSA program of questionable legality and that it was going to blow up in their faces." In early 2002, Roark also quietly arranged a meeting between Binney, Loomis, and Wiebe and Richard Burr, a North Carolina Republican on the House Intelligence Committee. Binney told Burr everything they had learned about the NSA wiretapping program, but Burr hardly said a word in response. Burr never followed up on the matter with Roark,

and there is no evidence he ever took any action to investigate the NSA program.

I'm not actually surprised that Burr learned the Intelligence Community was engaging in illegal behavior and did nothing. From what we've seen in his response to torture, he has served entirely to help CIA cover up the program and protect the torturers. Indeed, in his treatment of John Brennan's confirmation, he made efforts to ensure Brennan would have to protect the torturers too.

So it's no surprise that Burr heard details of an illegal program and ignored them.

Still, it's worth highlighting this detail because, if Democrats do lose the Senate as they are likely to do in November, Richard Burr will most likely become Senate Intelligence Committee Chair. While Dianne Feinstein may be a badly flawed Chair overseeing the IC, Burr will be a nightmare, unloosing them to do whatever they're ordered.

That's the kind of career advancement that comes to a guy who remains silent about wrongdoing.