

Voice of the Left

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October, 2006

Knock! Knock! Who's There? Bush/Cheney! Who Else!

Ever since we first heard that our government was spying on American citizens without search warrants, the Republican spin machine began working overtime to provide a litany of justifications. Now that the courts have made it clear that the spy program exceeded the legal authority of the executive branch of government, the Republican leadership has resorted to scare tactics and pure propaganda as part of a concerted effort to bring about new legislation that would legitimize the illegal program. Here are a few of the more popular myths that our friends on the Right have used to garner support for their secret spying operation.

"We must be able to act fast...so we can prevent new attacks," says our President. Sounds reasonable right? Well, the funny thing is that Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISA), which holds jurisdiction on the matter, authorizes search warrants for domestic surveillance up to 72 hours AFTER the surveillance begins. So, there is absolutely no truth to the administration's accusation that they needed to bypass the law to avoid delay in obtaining a warrant.

"The NSA domestic surveillance wasn't a secret program because the Bush administration did keep key congressional people informed they were doing this," said the Republican National Committee (RNC) in a press release this past December (and repeated by Bill O'Reilly on several occasions). In fact, a number of Democratic and Republican congressmen (including conservative Republican Peter Hoekstra of Michigan) have made it clear that the briefings provided by the administration (usually conducted by Vice President Cheney) did not include written reports. Former Senator Bob Graham is also on record for stating that he was never informed that the "program would involve eavesdropping on American citizens."

"President Clinton also authorized warrantless searches of U.S. citizens," a Fox News *Special Report* told us on December 21, 2005. Wrong again. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act signed by President Clinton on February 9, 1995 authorized warrantless searches provided that the search would not involve "the premises, information, material, or property of a United States person." Neither fair nor balanced.

The litany of falsehoods continues unabatedly.

Yet, conservatives tell us that we should not be concerned. After all, this is a program "to get the bad guys." OK...Let me get this straight. We're supposed to trust implicitly a regime that was wrong about weapons of mass destruction; Saddam's ties to al-Qaeda (the 911 commission said there was no "cohesive operational relationship"); how much the war in Iraq would cost ("Iraq's oil revenues would pay for the war" Rummy said); the

body armor issue (Rummy stated the “rumor” was “unequivocally false”); which swore that the CIA was not kidnapping people (they were); and actually fought against a ban on torture. Ironically, Bush practically had to be “tortured” into signing the recent ban!

Get my drift?

We have a government who has fought for the right to swoop down in the middle of the night, secretly detain us, throw us in a dungeon in Guantanamo (indefinitely), and even execute us after a good ole’ fashioned military tribunal... IN SECRET ... and we’re supposed to trust them?

But there’s a much bigger principle involved. Our system of government does not function on the basis that the citizenry be compelled to trust its leaders. In fact, we were founded by folks who didn’t want us to have to trust our leaders. That’s why we have a Constitution. No, it’s not perfect, and yes it needs a little fixin’ every now and then, but without it the United States does not exist. Let me say that again. Without the Constitution, there is no United States.

A sad lesson of history is that governments (all of them) have a long track record of abusing power when checks and balances to that power are removed. The American people need not make this same mistake. We must defeat our enemies, but we must do so standing firmly upon the rule of law.