



Written by on May 19, 2009

Republicans Weigh In on Pelosi-CIA Controversy

"If the speaker is accusing the CIA and other intelligence officials of lying or misleading the Congress then she should come forward with evidence and turn that over to the Justice Department," said Boehner on the popular Sunday news program. "If that's not the case, I think she ought to apologize to our intelligence officials."



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The Republican leader's ultimatum referred to a statement Pelosi had made in a May 14 news conference that the CIA had misled her in 2002 about the use of the waterboarding interrogation-torture technique. In the statement, Pelosi said that she was not told that waterboarding had been used, even though it had been. She said an aide informed her of our government's use of the widely condemned technique only after other legislators had been briefed in 2003.

In response to Pelosi's statements, CIA Director Leon Panetta wrote in a message to agency employees, "Let me be clear. It is not our policy or practice to mislead Congress. That is against our laws and our values." Panetta has headed the government spy agency only since February 13.

In response to Panetta's statements, Pelosi issued a response that sought to shift blame for incorrect briefings from the CIA to the Bush administration. "My criticism of the manner in which the Bush administration did not appropriately inform Congress is separate from my respect for those in the intelligence community who work to keep our country safe," read Pelosi's statement.

Other Republicans joined in the criticism of the House's top Democrat. "I think her accusations against our terror-fighters are irresponsible and, according to the CIA's record, Speaker Pelosi was briefed on what had been done," said Senator Kit Bond (R-Mo.), the senior Republican on the Senate Intelligence Committee. "It's outrageous that a member of Congress would call our terror-fighters liars."

Republican Party chairman Michael S. Steele, speaking on NBC's *Meet The Press*, appeared to take delight in what he implied was a major political gaff by the House Speaker. "I think the reality here is that Nancy Pelosi has stepped in it big time," said Steele. "The question for me is does the president support Nancy Pelosi's versions of what happened or his CIA director's version of what happened?"

Perhaps the strongest critic of Pelosi was Michigan Representative Pete Hoekstra, the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, who said on CNN's *American Morning* on May 18: "She made some outrageous accusations last week where she said that the CIA lied to her and lied systematically over a period of years. That is a very, very serious charge." Hoekstra continued: "Either the CIA needs to be held accountable for their performance during this time or the speaker needs to be held



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accountable and be responsible for the actions and the statements that she made last week. One or the other is correct, one or the other is wrong."

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said on *Fox News Sunday* on May 17: "We know what the CIA believes, the speaker apparently disagrees with that. The best way for the dispute to be resolved is through the intelligence committees. At some point we'll find out what the truth is."

And at some point we may know the truth about the assassinations of Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy, the sinking of the battleship *USS Maine* and the *RMS Lusitania*, what the Roosevelt administration knew about the impending attack on Pearl Harbor, and what our intelligence agencies knew about al-Qaeda agents within the United States prior to 9-11.

Maybe.

As for Pelosi's allegations, we must be careful not to let our speculation be colored by our opinion of Madame Speaker's overall political agenda. There is an old saying that even a stopped clock tells the right time twice a day, and sometimes even liberal Democrats get it right.

A notable example of this occurred back in 2001, with the passage of the Patriot act, and in 2003, when a piece of draft legislation crafted by activists at the U.S. Justice Department (officially entitled the Domestic Security Enhancement Act of 2003 [DSEA]), and dubbed "Patriot Act II" was unveiled. Though touted as "anti-terrorism" measures, both acts threatened rights that U.S. citizens had long regarded as sacrosanct under our Constitution.

Not unexpectedly, a leading opponent to these acts was Rep. Ron Paul (R.-Texas) a leading constitutionalist in Congress. Perhaps less expected, though, was the vocal opposition presented by Sen. Russ Feingold (D.-Wis.), known for his liberal votes on most issues. Senator Feingold, the only senator to vote against Patriot Act I, said of "Patriot Act II": "I have serious concerns ... and hope the Senate will give this bill more scrutiny than the first USA Patriot Act."

H.R. 3162, known as the "USA Patriot Act," was passed by the House on October 24, 2001, passed by the Senate the next day, and signed into law the day after that. The bill represented an unprecedented reversal of the Bill of Rights. It gave law enforcement and intelligence agencies vast new powers — allegedly to combat terrorism. It expanded the list of crimes deemed terrorist acts; increased the ability of law enforcement to secretly search homes and business records; expanded the FBI's wiretapping and surveillance authority; and provided for nationwide jurisdiction for search warrants and electronic surveillance devices, including the legal extension of those devices to e-mail and the Internet.

As we noted, Feingold was the only senator to vote against the Patriot Act. (Rep. Pelosi, however, voted *for* the act.) Rep. Ron Paul voted against it, along with some other representatives who were usually among the more liberal members of the House, such as Dennis Kucinich (D.-Ohio), Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), and Cynthia McKinney (D.-Ga.) who last year ran for president on the Green Party ticket.

Is this merely a matter of politics making strange bedfellows, or is there a lesson to be learned from these like-minded votes among dissimilar legislators?

The answer may lie in the fact that a love of liberty and an aversion to government that has grown so big and powerful that it threatens liberty may be so instinctive, that it transcends party and philosophical labels.

In attempting to decide whether Nancy Pelosi or the CIA are right concerning who told whom what, and when, it might be helpful to leave labels out of the equation. We might also ask: which of these



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adversaries is more dangerous to America? As destructive as her voting record and positions may have been in the past, at least Nancy Pelosi's record is open to public view.

As for the CIA, who knows what the successor agency to the old World War II-era OSS — an agency riddled with Trotskyites, by the way — has been doing to our liberties for 62 years?

The best outcome from this dispute that we can hope for is that both the speaker's and the spy agency's reputations will both be damaged by the controversy, rendering them less able to weaken the safeguards established by our Constitution.

Photo: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi



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