

SUSAN COLLINS CAN'T DECIDE WHETHER TO ABANDON HER INFANT, PCLOB

Politico has an article predicting civil liberties will become a big issue this year. I'm skeptical (I say that as someone whose Rep the GOP is trying to take out largely because of his defense of civil liberties).

But I am interested in what Susan Collins had to say about Democratic challenger Shenna Bellows' criticism of her stance on civil liberties.

In a phone interview from Maine, Collins rebutted criticism that she has not done enough to protect against civil liberties, highlighting legislation she co-sponsored in 2004 that created the independent Privacy and Civil Liberties Board and her support for recent proposals to tighten oversight over the surveillance programs. But, she said, doing away with the ability of the government to collect phone records would cause great harm to the country's ability to root out terrorism.

"We know that there were plots thwarted solely or partially by the programs, so doing away with it altogether would mean a less safe America," said Collins, who sits on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and has supported the PATRIOT Act and legislation codifying broader electronic surveillance.

You see, it was only 4 days ago that Collins was disowning her infant creation, PCLOB, because it had presented a hard-hitting report that said the dragnet was not just bad policy, but against the law.

“As the mother of this board, that [split decision] is not what I’m looking for,” said Sen. Susan Collins (R., Maine), who co-wrote the post-Sept. 11 legislation creating the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board. The split in the board’s first major report “really weakens its recommendations and undermines the role that we envisioned it would play,” she said.

At the moment when Collins’ self-described offspring took its first step, the Senator felt it had not chosen bipartisanship over stating the truth. I guess we understand what role Collins felt it could play.

And as for her purported efforts to tighten oversight over the dragnet (which includes measures to strengthen PCLOB she probably now regrets), while she did support some improvements to DiFi’s Fake FISA Fix, she not only cast a decisive vote against limiting dragnet retention to 3 years, but even backed a failed Tom Coburn amendment to “eliminate restrictions on the retention of bulk metadata.”