

# IT TURNS OUT THERE WAS NO WOLF

Even as Mike McConnell is making ham-handed attempts to prove his good faith with Democrats, the White House is facing up to the fact that its fear-mongering no longer works.

The White House, seeking to break a months-long standoff, has signaled to Democratic lawmakers it is open to negotiation over a proposal to expand government spy powers, according to officials familiar with the conversations.

[snip]

Over the two-week spring recess, administration officials contacted Democratic leaders to suggest they were open to compromise on updating the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. "We definitely want to get it done," said White House spokesman Tony Fratto. "We've had some initial conversations with Congress about the need to get FISA reform done quickly." He added that Mr. Bush still prefers the Senate measure, which the White House negotiated with Senate Democrats.

[snip]

**The White House's more conciliatory posture reflects a recognition that the Bush administration's leverage on national-security matters has slipped since this past summer**, a top Republican congressional aide said. "There's a recognition that if they're actually going to get a product they can support, there's going to have to be some new level of engagement," the aide said.

For months, the White House has tried to replicate its performance last August,

when Republicans outmaneuvered Democrats and forced passage of a temporary expansion of domestic spy powers. Republicans then tried to use the temporary law's expiration date to force Democrats to accept a permanent expansion. But since the law expired Feb. 16, House Democrats have stood firm.

Democrats see the White House's new tack as acknowledgment that their strategy failed. **"Once they saw we had the votes in the House for something other than the Senate bill, they saw the writing on the wall,"** said one Democratic aide. **"They're more willing to reach out and begin those conversations."** [my emphasis]

We're not there yet on a reasonable FISA bill. After all, Mukasey and McConnell are still plying dishonest claims. The Gorman article points to Steny Hoyer as the key player in the House, which seems logical—which means we're still trying to persuade a moderate to stand firm.

But this is a good sign. If for no other thing, it suggests that Republicans are facing an election season, with a Presidential candidate who believes he should be elected solely because his Daddy was a big Admiral, finally recognizing the bankruptcy of its fear-mongering strategy.