

BIOTERRORISM ON A GRASSY KNOLL

Joe Persichini, the Assistant Director of the DC FBI Field Office said of Bruce Ivins yesterday, "It appears, based on the evidence, that he was acting alone."

Yet he and DC US Attorney Jeff Taylor seem painfully aware that their evidence doesn't add up to a compelling case. In particular, Taylor and Persichini dodged and weaved whenever asked about any hard evidence that tied Bruce Ivins to the mailing—rather than just the production—of the anthrax.

For example, Taylor made an incredibly misleading statement to suggest that the envelopes used in the attack were only available in Frederick Maryland. He claimed that, "based on the analysis, we were able to conclude that the envelopes used in the mailings were very likely sold in a post office in the Frederick, MD post office in 2001." He continued to say that Ivins maintained a PO Box "at the post office from which these pre-franked envelopes were sold."

But the truth is that Frederick Maryland is just one of hundreds of post offices at which those envelopes would have been available:

Subsequent to the attacks, an effort was made to collect all such envelopes for possible forensic examination, including the identification of defects that occur during the envelope manufacturing process. As a result of this collection, envelopes with printing defects identical to printing defects identified on the envelopes utilized in the anthrax attacks during the fall of 2001 were collected from the Fairfax Main post office in Fairfax, Virginia and the Cumberland and Elkton post offices in Maryland. The Fairfax Main, Cumberland,

Maryland, and Elkton, Maryland post offices are supplied by the Dulles Stamp Distribution Office (SDO), located in Dulles, Virginia. The Dulles SDO distributed "federal eagle" envelopes to post offices throughout Maryland and Virginia. Given that the printing defects identified on the envelopes used in the attacks are transient, thereby being present on only a small population of the federal eagle envelopes produced, and that envelopes with identical printing defects to those identified on the envelopes used in the attacks were recovered from post offices serviced by the Dulles SDO, it is reasonable to conclude that the federal eagle envelopes utilized in the attacks were purchased from a post office in Maryland or Virginia. [my emphasis]

In other words, Taylor suggests, inaccurately, that Ivins' post office was the only one where those envelopes were available, rather than one of many post offices.

Then, when Persichini was asked about whether there was any hard evidence found in the searches of Ivins' car and home, Persichini dodged by directing reporters back to the documents—documents which say nothing about such hard evidence.

QUESTION: A question for Mr. Persichini. You build – this is obviously, at this point, a circumstantial case. You build a strong circumstantial case. What direct evidence do you have? For instance, do you have any tape that was used on the envelope that was recovered from his home? Do you have any other – any other evidence that clearly would link him? For instance, in the affidavit, it mentions that people of this sort often keep souvenirs. Did you find anything like that at his home?

MR. PERSICHINI: Well first, I would refer back to the documents, because that's the purpose of our press conference today, to provide you the documents and the information pertained in the documents. As it relates to admitting evidence into it, I'm going to refer back to Jeff. But again, we're looking at the document itself and the purpose of our release and providing this information to the families. That's first and foremost for us. So I won't discuss the actuality of evidence, then.

Another reporter asks whether Ivins' handwriting or hair matches up with the evidence found (note, the official transcript is inaccurate here; I've made corrections in brackets).

QUESTION: Jeff, did you find any handwriting samples or hair samples that would have matched Dr. Ivins to the envelopes where the hair samples were found in the mailbox?

MR. [PERSICHINI]: We did not find any handwriting analysis or hair samples in the mailbox. So there were no facts and circumstances of that part. [Persichini walks away from the podium.]

QUESTION: You didn't take handwriting samples from Dr. Ivins? MR. TAYLOR: We examined handwriting samples but then there was no comparison made or a specific identification of the handwriting. It appears that when the analysts would look at it, that there was an attempt to disguise the handwriting. So it was unable to make a comparison.

With respect to handwriting samples, we did have indications from individuals with whom we spoke that there appeared to be some similarities in handwriting that were apparent. That said, we did

not have a scientifically valid conclusion that we thought would lead us to be able to admit that in evidence.

Persichini, in particular, doesn't seem to want to talk about the handwriting samples—and the lack of any real evidence matching Ivins' handwriting to that used on the envelopes. Furthermore, he outright lies when he says there were no hair samples taken from the mailbox.

The collection box on Nassau Street was identified through forensic biological swabbing of every U.S. Postal Service drop box that collects mail to be processed at the Hamilton facility. Further forensic examination of the contaminated mailbox recovered a number of Caucasian human hairs from inside the box, which are suitable for comparison.

Granted, there's no reason to think that the Caucasian hair in the Nassau Street box had anything to do with the anthrax case—but wouldn't it be more honest to say that?

In short, while Taylor talked a lot about the possibility of making an entirely circumstantial case and claimed repeatedly that, had they tried this, they would have been able to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Bruce Ivins was "acting alone," they tried to dodge admitting that while they have fairly strong evidence tying Ivins to the anthrax used in the case, their evidence goes to shit as soon as you try to prove that Ivins then took that anthrax and mailed it to reporters and senators.