

FBI STILL USING SHINY OBJECTS TO DISTRACT FROM THEIR FLIMSY ANTHRAX CASE

The WaPo's big takeaway from the Robert Mueller/FBI oversight hearing today is something I reported last month: Pat Leahy believes Bruce Ivins did not act alone. As Leahy said today,

If Ivins is the one who sent the letter, I do not believe in any manner that he is the only person involved in this attack on Congress and the American people. I believe there are other people involved either as accessories before or after. I believe there are others out there who could [should?] be charged with murder.

Now that the WaPo has caught up, here's where this story has been and continues to go. The FBI is attempting to use the shiny object of their fancy new science techniques to distract from how crappy the rest of the evidence in this case is.

Both yesterday and today, when Mueller was asked about an independent review of the case, he said the FBI would have the National Academy of Sciences appoint a board of scientists to review the genetic analysis that led the FBI to believe that the anthrax used in the attack came from a flask in Bruce Ivins' lab. When Arlen Specter asked to name some people to serve on that review board, Mueller said—as he responded to most questions about the anthrax case—he would have to get back to Specter.

But, more importantly, it's not just that Americans are wondering whether the fancy new genetic analysis the FBI did is sound.

We're worried about Pat Leahy's seeming

certainty that only scientists at Dugway in UT and Batelle in OH have the technical competence to make the anthrax used in the attacks; when Leahy made Mueller call FBI to find out if that were true, Mueller eventually responded that the answer is classified. We're worried that the FBI's explanation for how and why Ivins would have driven several hours to Princeton to mail the anthrax letters keeps changing from dubious story to dubious story—meaning even if Ivins made this anthrax, they have no proof he mailed it. And we're worried that the FBI seems to have attributed Ivins' wife's beliefs to him in order to explain the choice of targets—even though Leahy's apparent suspicion (that the attack was related to recent efforts to develop an offensive bioweapons program) provides a much more plausible explanation for the targets.

In other words, the flimsiest aspects of the anthrax case have nothing to do with genetic analysis. But it's through an independent review of the genetic analysis, and genetic analysis only, that Robert Mueller would like to use to reassure us that the case is sound.