

WHAT DOES A HOUSE INTELLIGENCE CHAIRMANSHIP COST?

As a number of you have pointed out, CQ reports that the NSA picked up intercepts of Jane Harman agreeing to lobby DOJ to back off charges on AIPAC's Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman in exchange for AIPAC's support of her getting the Chair of the House Intelligence Committee.

Rep. Jane Harman , the California Democrat with a longtime involvement in intelligence issues, was overheard on an NSA wiretap telling a suspected Israeli agent that she would lobby the Justice Department reduce espionage-related charges against two officials of the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee, the most powerful pro-Israel organization in Washington.

Harman was recorded saying she would "waddle into" the AIPAC case "if you think it'll make a difference," according to two former senior national security officials familiar with the NSA transcript.

In exchange for Harman's help, the sources said, the suspected Israeli agent pledged to help lobby Nancy Pelosi , D-Calif., then-House minority leader, to appoint Harman chair of the Intelligence Committee after the 2006 elections, which the Democrats were heavily favored to win.

Now, there are couple of interesting details about this news.

First, as it happens the AIPAC trial is in a very active stage right now, with both sides submitting schedules in preparation for a May 6 and 7 CIPA hearing that may end up giving the

AIPAC defendants access to classified material with which to defend themselves; if the government faces setbacks in that CIPA hearing, I think it likely that the government gives up the case. If I were a law enforcement guy whose case was crumbling, I might gin up some press attention to convince people of the value of the case.

So I find it interesting that the three sources for this story want to talk about Harman, but not the AIPAC guy on the other end of the call.

The identity of the “suspected Israeli agent” could not be determined with certainty, and officials were extremely skittish about going beyond Harman’s involvement to discuss other aspects of the NSA eavesdropping operation against Israeli targets, which remain highly classified.

I’ll comment on the Gonzales half of this story in a new post.